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Masculinidade, Melancolia e Misoginia nos Filmes de Sam Peckinpah

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You wanna come along? It ain't like it used to be, but it will do.
Old Sykes (Edmond O'Brien) in Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch.*

o júri

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palavras-chave Masculinidade, melancolia, misoginia, misógino

resumo

Com esta tese procurei abordar três aspectos que se salientam na obra de Sam Peckinpah: masculinidade, melancolia e misoginia. Tendo realizado apenas catorze filmes, Peckinpah distinguiu-se na história do cinema Americano não apenas pelos elementos técnicos inovadores mas também pelo facto de os seus filmes estarem em sintonia com o *zeitgeist* dos tempos turbulentos em que viveu. A partir da análise destes três aspectos, pretendi realçar o trabalho de um realizador cuja personalidade temperamental e a difícil relação com os estúdios tendem a obfuscar uma exploração menos romanticizada do seu trabalho. Apesar de se ter distinguido no Western, Peckinpah aventurou-se por outros géneros, nunca abandonando as principais preocupações e mundividência que conferem ao seu trabalho uma coerência temática. Enquanto o cinema Americano promove um modelo fortemente patriarcal e hegemónico, os filmes de Peckinpah, apesar de se centrarem na masculinidade, tendem a subverter este modelo ao colocarem em evidência as falhas e fraquezas dos seus protagonistas, que se revelam vulneráveis e mais suscetíveis ao sofrimento. Esta singularidade permitiu-me sublinhar a disposição elegíaca dos seus filmes e a sua relação com melancolia, uma característica que se associa à perceção de um Oeste em declínio e ao anacronismo dos seus protagonistas. Peckinpah ficou marcado pela sua postura misógina não apenas através dos seus comentários precipitados e irrefletidos, presentes nas várias entrevistas que concedeu, mas também porque manifestou uma relação problemática com as mulheres, algo que se refletiu na forma como as tratou e representou no ecrã. Esta tese procura assim abordar uma vertente menos agradável da sua obra que muitos críticos minimizam ou percecionam como resultado de uma crítica feminista inflamatória. Espero assim que, com este trabalho, tenha conseguido explorar a riqueza do cinema de Sam Peckinpah, demonstrando que a herança que este nos deixou ultrapassa em muito a técnica artística dos seus filmes ou a violência que ele explorou exaustivamente com a sua entrega à realização. Esta herança reside na melancolia que atravessa o seu trabalho, resultante de desencanto e perda.

keywords Masculinity, melancholia, misogyny, misogynistic, misogynist

abstract

With this thesis I have attempted to analyse three salient features in Sam Peckinpah's films: masculinity, melancholia and misogyny. Having made only fourteen films, Peckinpah distinguished himself as an important director in the history of American cinema not only because of his innovative techniques but also because his work was so much in tune with the *zeitgeist* of the turbulent times in which he lived. The analysis of these three main themes aims to cast some light on the work of a director whose temperamental traits and difficult relation with the film industry tend to obfuscate an un-romanticized view of his *oeuvre*. Peckinpah's best work was within the generic traits of the Western but he also made forays into other genres, never forsaking the main worries and worldview that give his films a sense of thematic coherence.

While American cinema is inclined to foreground a strong patriarchal hegemonic model, Peckinpah's films, although centered on masculinity, unwittingly undermine this model by disclosing flaws and weaknesses in his protagonists, rendering them more vulnerable and prone to suffering. This singularity allowed me to bring into relief the elegiac mood of his films, a characteristic which entwines with the perception of a fading West and with the obsolescence of his male characters. Peckinpah became notorious in his association with misogyny not only because of his impromptu comments in the interviews he gave but also because he displayed a problematic relationship with women in real life, giving them a dismissive treatment in his films. This thesis attempts to deal with this unsavoury feature which many critics disavow or simple ascribe to inflamed feminist criticism. I hope in this work I have managed to address the richness of Peckinpah's films and to reveal how he left a legacy which surpasses the technical artistry for which he became known and the violence which he stylised with the details of his obsessive directorial flair. This legacy lies in the melancholy mood that suffuses his work, resulting from disenchantment and loss.

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Introduction to the theme

"It's not so much the dying that you hate, it's not knowing what they are going to say about you".
Cable Hogue (Jason Robards) in *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970)

My interest in Sam Peckinpah's work goes all the way back to my early love for the Western genre, an odd taste for a woman since the Western can be seen as being at variance with what is commonly regarded as women's tastes. I have always been fascinated by the genre, its imagery and even its recurrent tropes of male narcissism and rugged individualism. Sam Peckinpah remains one of the most charismatic names in the history of American cinema although he had a short, albeit trailblazing, career, having made only fourteen films. Surprisingly, he is relatively unregarded in Portugal outside cineaste circles as I have concluded whenever I was asked about the topic of this thesis in casual conversations. When compared to other more easily recognizable names, Peckinpah may elicit some inquiring looks. Peckinpah's finest work belongs within the Western genre; he had been working within its conventions from the very beginning of his career. Also, for reasons of temperament and family background, the Western provided a landscape whose iconography and idiosyncrasies he felt entirely comfortable with. He made forays into other genres, but never abandoned the main concerns which are pervasive in his Westerns nor his obsession with a world which David Weddle describes as "resolutely male" (1996: 11).

Peckinpah's films have generated conflicting opinions, arousing both heated arguments and outright antagonism; few have remained indifferent to them. David Weddle states:

> Critics have never quite known what to do about Sam Peckinpah. Even at the peak of his career in the late 60s and 70s, when many hailed him as one of the most brilliant film-makers of his generation, as many condemned him as a misogynist, sadistic, even a fascist. (For the record he actually supported liberal democratic politicians). In the late 70s, when both his life and art spiralled into a nihilistic abyss, even his most ardent defenders abandoned him. Yet, as much as we want to turn away from Peckinpah, to shrug him off and forget him, we cannot (1995: 28).

Interestingly, his *oeuvre* has been more acclaimed since his death than at the time of its making - except during the highdays of 1968-1972 when he was hailed as a ground-breaking director - the film maker becoming the object of rehabilitation and renewed interest[1] in recent years. Ever since cinema first captured my imagination, Peckinpah has always piqued my curiosity. Having already devoted my Masters work to the Western genre and the way it constructs masculinity, analyzing star personae who have been associated with the premises of the Western - John Wayne and Clint Eastwood - Peckinpah was one of the names which surfaced recurrently when Western directors were cited. In this earlier work I also explored how vigilantism is associated with an image of indomitable masculinity and how the constructions of manhood within the conventions of the Western have always attempted to escape from the constrictions of the law. Peckinpah's work seemed to push this tendency in new vulnerable directions.

Sam Peckinpah was best known for his gory spectacles of violence which earned him the epithet of "Bloody Sam" (Fine: 1991; Fulwood: 2002). Tellingly, Marshall Fine states how he hated "the nickname Bloody Sam" since "he was offended at the name's shortsightedness" (XIII). Peckinpah himself recognized how this was reductive and fell short of suggesting the complexity of his films. As Fine states, "While the graphic violence of his films was intended to make a statement, violence itself was not the statement" (xiii). Pauline Kael, quoted by Seydor, argued that his work was "recklessly high on beauty and excess" (1997: xx). And taking Kael's opinion into account, Gabrielle Murray states:

> In an allusion to Kael, the 1995 Peckinpah retrospective held by the Film Society of Lincoln Center was entitled Blood of a Poet. In this short phrase Kael has captured something elemental about Peckinpah's films, something that has often been ignored-

[1] In 2012 Michael Bliss edited *Peckinpah Today: New Essays on the Film of Sam Peckinpah* which includes essays not only on his most well regarded films like *The Wild Bunch* but also on films which are often dismissed as less significant in his career like *The Deadly Companions* or *The Killer Elite*. The online journal *Senses of Cinema* also published a tribute to Peckinpah's work by Benjamin Kerstein. Moreover, in the foreword to Paul Seydor's work *Peckinpah: The Western Films: a Reconsideration*, David Weddle mentions: "By the early 1990s, the Peckinpah revival had gathered irresistible momentum. The BBC produced a ninety-minute documentary on his life. Retrospectives of his work were staged at the Lincoln Centre in New York, at the Amiens Film festival, at the Cinemathèque in Paris, at the University of Missouri in Columbia, and at London's National Film Theatre. *Film Comment* and *Sight and Sound* published major reappraisals" (1997: xvi).

> that the intensity, resonance and vitality of these films' aesthetic expressiveness, be it violent or utopian, take us into the realm of the poetic (2004: 5).

For some of the most prominent Peckinpah scholars, such as Michael Bliss, Paul Seydor and Stephen Prince, what distinguishes Peckinpah is the way he informed his films with a nostalgic mood, a lyrical quality, which accounts for the deep impact his work has had on contemporary cinema. One can sense his underlying romanticism and his regression to an idealized past grounded in - but not circumscribed by - the frontier mythology. David Weddle observes:

> The eroticized violence in Peckinpah's films, the constant juxtaposition of romantic idealism with love of savagery, reflects America's own vacillation between utopian aspirations and a fetish for brutality - a dichotomy stitched deep in the fabric of the Wild West mythology. Peckinpah used the framework of the western to explore the conflicting polarities within the American psyche and within himself. The last great director of western films, Peckinpah had himself been raised in the fading remnants of that Wild West. He grew up to see it smothered beneath the asphalt lava of civilization, and as a filmmaker he would make its death throes his most potent theme (1996: 10-11).

Peckinpah's notoriously troubled relations with studio executives and his convoluted personal life, marked by alcohol and cocaine addiction, eventually took their toll on his creative energy and wreaked havoc on his reputation, to such an extent that his last creation was no more than jobbing work, a two-minute video for the musician Julian Lennon. It is apparent that his career was curtailed by a self-destructive urge. Accordingly, with Peckinpah, one always wonders "what if"? What if producers hadn't interfered so much with his work, what if he hadn't pursued the path of personal self-destruction, what if he had been more compliant with the economic system within which he was supposed to function? Thus, the idea of incompleteness, of unrealized potential, seems to loom large whenever his work is considered by film criticism. In a posthumous honoring at the Directors' Guild in 1985, Robert Culp, cited by Marshall Fine, suggested that many people were mourning the films that Peckinpah never got to make:

> The miracle of Sam was that he got any of them done at all, given the odds against a creative force constantly and diametrically opposed to the establishment. It's amazing

> that there is a *Wild Bunch.* Let's just think about that incredible, savage, iron-burning will; that he got them done and that we knew him (384).

The idea that he was a misunderstood genius, based on the many accounts of his fiery nature, has had its romantic appeal in many explorations of his work. This can be best perceived in various critics' desperate disavowal of his misogyny. I have attempted to avoid this pitfall by bringing into relief not only his artistic value but also the more unsavory aspects that his violent world also encompassed. Thus, this work is structured around three main themes which reflect distinctive features of his cinematic vision: masculinity, melancholia and misogyny. For each theme, I have started with a general theoretical approach, followed by an analysis of contextual or generic features appropriate to the Western and only finally have I turned to Peckinpah's *oeuvre*, exploring the applicability of ideas in these domains to his films. Before this, I begin with a brief incursion into Peckinpah's career and offer a summary of the literature which has been produced around his life and work. This will constitute part one of this thesis. From the fourteen films directed by Peckinpah I have selected nine for closer scrutiny. The reason I have foregrounded these works for the different parts lies in the fact that the themes addressed seem to be more salient there. However, the remaining films will be examined as well although not so much subject to close reading. I have not neglected *Convoy* either despite the fact that some critics consider it an embarrassing effort in Peckinpah's career (Prince: 1998; Mesce Jr: 2001) since the film remains an interesting - albeit flawed - illustration of Peckinpah's favourite tropes.

Masculinity is at the heart of Peckinpah's films, not only for reasons of generic constraint - since I have argued that the Western was his privileged genre - but also because Peckinpah recurrently mourns the obsolescence of his male protagonists in a disappearing West - or in any environment which serves as a surrogate for that West - where a certain estrangement dooms them to drifting. Part two is subdivided. This principle of organization will be followed throughout the work. Thus, the first section gives an insight into theoretical work on masculinity, analyzing how the term has gained visibility in gender studies which have helped to deconstruct onscreen male images. I have attempted to disclose how the male body constitutes an ideal ground for reflection on representations of manhood and how Peckinpah's work dwells on the damaged corporeality of masculinity. The second section

explores how late sixties and seventies cinema, in its innovative allure, prepared the ground - and allowed for the maturation - of Peckinpah's own unique aesthetic style. By positing these as structuring ideas, I have selected three of Peckinpah's films - *Major Dundee* (1965), *Ride the High Country* (1962) and *The Wild Bunch* (1969) - to illustrate them. The three films have allowed me to show how masculinity in Peckinpah's films oscillates between the need to restore some form of male heroics and the disenchanted recognition that this has become an impossibility.

This pivotal argument engages inevitably with the third part, which deals with melancholia. In the first section of this part, melancholia is explored from a more historical and theoretical point of view. Here I try to demonstrate that from the first accounts of this malady, the body took center stage. Melancholia has proved to be an elusive term, escaping from any clear definition. Melancholia has become subsumed under the more mundane "depression", and, as will be argued, became strongly gendered: while men are melancholy, an elevating evidence of brilliance and scope for reflection, depression was often relegated to the realm of the feminine and frequently perceived as a sign of weakness. Freud's essay on the distinction between melancholia and mourning acquires a special resonance here since it explores how the former is associated with a sense of loss which will never be overcome but which then sets in as a gnawing feeling of guilt and grief. This will be central to my analysis of Peckinpah's work and the way it is infused with a disquieting longing for an object of love which has been lost. The second section will elaborate on how the Western is imbued with a "gendered" melancholia by foregrounding brooding male protagonists who offer up a glamorized image in their taciturnity. The third section from this part will bring into focus how melancholia is dramatized problematically in Peckinpah's construction of masculinity, since his male protagonists are not personifications of brilliance in the Aristotelian tradition but rather embodiments of failure. For this section, I have selected *Junior Bonner* (1972), *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), *Cross of Iron* (1977) and finally *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia (*1974). Operating in diverse genres from the Western, to the War movie, to the action thriller, Peckinpah shows through his emphasis on subjective states of mind - achieved through careful montage - that melancholia is an ineluctable response to the world as he finds it.

Finally, part four will be devoted to misogyny. As with the preceding structural divisions this part is subdivided: the first section offering a more theoretical approach to the concept of misogyny, emphasizing how it is difficult to unpack. I will also attempt to give some insight into misogyny in the American cinema followed by a description of how women in the Western have been deemed peripheral in most classical readings of the genre, but highlighting nonetheless how some revisionist films position women as central and agency-driven. The second section of this fourth part is concerned with Peckinpah and his misogynistic traits. In order to explore this thematic area, I have analyzed both *The Getaway* (1972) and *Straw Dogs* (1971), two films where anxiety over a besieged masculinity manifests itself most strongly. Whilst the happy ending of the first seems to constitute a reflection of Peckinpah's belief in what Bliss calls "the realm of wish fulfillment" (1993: 273), mostly represented in Peckinpah by a backward Mexico, the utterly pessimistic tone of the second hinders the possibility of any resolution and remains a violent dramatization of a deep-seated distrust of women. I acknowledge that misogyny was, far and away, the most difficult thematic area for me. Firstly, because of my love of the Western, I was tempted to dismiss its importance to my thesis. Secondly, because Peckinpah displays a double-bind position regarding women: in life and in his films misogyny is covered by a veneer of polite condescension and even deference regarding women, that often masked his own suspicions and even anxieties as far as women were concerned. Peckinpah's female characters are always sexualized, as the unwitting object of male intentions or as provocative of them. They rarely achieve any kind of physical independence.

Thus, with this work I hope to shed some further light on a director whose work and personal life was marked by controversy. Bearing in mind that cultural studies is a wide area, encompassing gender studies as well, this thesis cannot help but show how gendered representations are ingrained in cinematic language, bringing into focus a director whose work investigates what being a man signifies in a world of change and transition. Cultural studies has also made me sensitive to the wider environment in which Peckinpah made his films. America was passing through the second most turbulent period in its history (the 1960s and 70s) following the trauma of its nineteenth-century Civil War. To say that his films are violent is to say no more than that violence was endemic to the age, with widespread street

protest, political assassination and radical social change everywhere apparent. Even the comedies of the period were increasingly violent: Stanley Kramer's film *It's a Mad Mad Mad World* (1963), ostensibly a picaresque slapstick comedy, shows Americans both irredeemably corrupt and at one another's throats. Part of the challenge of this thesis is pick out that which was specific to Peckinpah the artist and that which to some extent belongs to the period's highly distinctive *zeitgeis*t. I hope I have managed to do that.

Part I

Sam Peckinpah

2. “I suppose I’m something of an outlaw myself”, Sam Peckinpah in an interview with Stephen Farber (Farber 1969: 9)

I- A convoluted career

"Don't make me out to be a saint, but don't put me down too deep!"
Cable Hogue (Jason Robards) in *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970)

With this thesis I have attempted to explore Sam Peckinpah's work in its multi-layered complexity. I realize that much has been written about him by important film critics who have analyzed the artistic impact of his films during his life time and after his death. Thus, to find a fresh start is a challenge when Peckinpah has already attracted so much critical attention. A great deal of theoretical work has concentrated on Peckinpah's visual portrayal of violence and the way this is achieved through a highly crafted technique of montage. Although violence remains an inescapable aspect of his films, it will be approached not so much in its aesthetic dimension but in its articulation with a specific image of masculinity that emerges recurrently in his work. The slow-motion technique, the blood squibs, the intersection of shots with different timings, resulting from the use of multiple camera angles, amounted to creating an aesthetics of violence which was stylistically radical in its kinetic appeal. That Monty Python created a parody of his style in a sketch in 1970 of the early 50s fluffy musical Julian Slade's *Salad Days* shows how he was so deeply associated with particular directorial techniques. However, Peckinpah's technical expertise will only be referenced from time to time in this work and not subjected to a thoroughgoing exploration.

Even when Peckinpah was at the peak of his career, his problematic relation with the film industry was apparent. Paul Seydor states that "Like Orson Welles, Peckinpah was blessed in becoming a legend early on and damned by having to live up to it the rest of his life (1997: XXIII). Peckinpah's notoriety came to a head with *The Wild Bunch* (1969), which helped strengthen his connection with screen violence in such a way that films like *Ride the High Country* (1962), *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970) or *Junior Bonner* (1972) are oftentimes ignored or deemed atypical in Peckinpah's universe. This also had the pernicious effect of labelling and stereotyping his work, thereby conditioning the viewers' response to it. Marshall Fine has this to say about his career:

> There were two watershed films in Peckinpah's career. *The Wild Bunch* lifted him out of exile and back into the business for the most successful years of his life. *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* was the other landmark - the film that sent him into a tailspin, both personally and professionally, from which his career never recovered (240).

If *The Wild Bunch* gave him the opportunity to restore his reputation as a great director - after a three-year period when he was unemployed, having been sacked from the direction of *The Cincinnati Kid* by producer Martin Ransohoff[2] - *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* presaged, with its erratic dilatory shooting, his progressive slackening of directorial control due to his growing problems with alcohol and his use of drugs. Many of his films were maimed by the studios; the most blatant examples were *Major Dundee* and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid,* where the bowdlerized final product is painfully registered in narrative inconsistencies. And yet, with the advantage of hindsight, one can understand how Peckinpah's artistic exuberance might have made many producers squirm with discomfort at the thought of working with a man who constantly went beyond assigned budgets and fell behind schedule. Even recognizing the economic imperatives of the film industry, while researching the production history of his work, I could not help but lament the fact that Peckinpah's career ended in such a dispiriting way.[3] Having been hailed as a maverick whose independence projected the spirit of the times in which he lived, his spiraling into physical and emotional degradation turned him into "a producer's worst nightmare" (Weddle 1996: 514). Stephen Prince criticizes the film industry by saying:

> The Hollywood industry accepts self-abusive and destructive behavior from actors, filmmakers and production executives so long as this behavior coincides with a proven ability to generate revenue (…). Had not Peckinpah's chemical dependency so compromised his ability to work, and had he been willing to make more formulaic pictures with great box-office potential, such self-destruction might have been compatible with the continuance of his career (1998: 214).

[2] Weddle explains how Ransohoff's vision for the film was different from the one Peckinpah had projected. Thus, he accused him of going to great lengths to film a nude scene and used that as an excuse to fire him from the direction (1996).

[3] In the Foreword to Paul Seydor's *Peckinpah: the Western Films*: *A Reconsideration,* David Weddle writes: "His final job involved a couple of music videos for Julian Lennon. Shortly before he died, he muttered to his wife, Begonia Palacios "My last movie was only two minutes long" (1997: xv).

Peckinpah had difficulties in working within the economic constraints of a system which interferes with artistic freedom. The fact that by the end of his career he was forced to abandon any qualm he might have had regarding the quality of the projects he undertook expresses how desperate he was to work, realizing that he had fallen victim to his own excesses. In fact, while at the beginning of his cinematic work he was capable of securing the attention of major studios, such as Columbia, Warner Brothers and MGM, which still believed in his box-office appeal, the débâcle of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* set the stage for his progressive falling out of grace with more powerful producers and big studios. Bill Mesce Jr states:

> Having fought with production execs on most of his films, the major studios were reluctant to have much further to do with him, which resulted in him being pushed further and further away from the circuit of major films made by major producers. Typed by his successes with action films, minor producers funneled their action-oriented projects - another growing industry trend - Peckinpah's way (2001: 90).

He was a compulsive rewriter of the scripts he was given. This was a painstaking, energy-sapping process which left him exhausted and took its toll on his personal life. He always attempted to impose himself upon the material he was working on and his shrewd attention to detail often led him to an obsessive quest for authenticity during location shootings, which ended in conflicts and notorious bouts of fury. Even with *Convoy* (1978), when he appeared to be willing to comply with the formulas of the comedy action movie, his notes on the script suggest that he envisaged something more vital for the film which might overcome the weaknesses of the script. This would be the movement and dynamism of the convoy itself, representing as it were a creative life force. As Elaine Marshall states: "The story itself proceeds from the growth of the convoy - its increasing size, activity, complexity, and power for evoking change within and outside itself" (2003: 213). That he had a different vision for the movie is borne out by Marshall who, based on the reading of Peckinpah's "*Convoy* notes", writes:

> But despite the various difficulties he was facing, despite his recurring anxiety that "this picture" was suffering from "a sickness of the spirit", Peckinpah maintained hope that he could surpass the "rottenness" he felt the movie had started with and bring forth a picture "in the mother tongue", a phrase that seems to have meant

> making the most of what was available to him: trucks, images, the cinematic process itself. "Let's start making a film - a visual film," he told the incoming cinematographer (212).

The irony is that, like the convoy itself, and its aborted political message, Peckinpah was not able to get anywhere and the last years of his career were as directionless as the meandering journey he had envisioned for those massive trucks. Although producer interference is an unavoidable topic in Peckinpah's career, my aim is not to dwell too much on the studios' maiming of his films. Paul Seydor, for example, goes into great detail analyzing how *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* went through a convoluted restoration process resulting in the 2005 special edition.[4] All of which is to say that Peckinpah's *oeuvre* incorporates the consequences of his bellicose stance regarding producers, and yet, despite this, my aim is to explore how these films, truncated and maimed as they may be, nevertheless reveal a pessimistic vision of the world that was both the product of its time and the result of Peckinpah's deep-seated melancholia.

Moreover, under the influence of the *auteur* theory in the 60s, Peckinpah's work has always been associated with a set of stylistic traits and an underlying thematic consistency. No wonder that Jim Kitses's first edition of *Horizons West: Studies in Authorship within the Western*, written in the wake of *auteurism* in 1969, included Peckinpah along with Anthony Mann and Budd Boetticher as directors whose work centered on recurrent "themes, structures and formal qualities" (1969: 7) and reflected through the Western "milieu and mores" (8) a singular vision of the world. The concept of auteurism was first articulated by François Truffaut in his essay "Un Certain Tendence du Cinema Français" (1954) for *Cahiers du Cinema,* where he first coined the phrase *politique des auteurs* bringing into focus the notion of film authorship, implying that a film should be an expression of its director's artistic view and personal, idiosyncratic style regardless of production or studio-imposed constraints (Nowell-Smith: 2008). In this sense, Nowell-Smith also argues that the generation that would beget the French New Wave "developed their idea of mise-en-scène to incorporate within it the notion of the director-author as a controlling intelligence"

[4] In "The Death and Afterlife of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*" (Bliss: 2012), Seydor explains the differences between the original theatrical release and the restored version.

(2008: 34). This notion of authorship gained popularity in America and helped shape a new critical discourse on film spectatorship. Apropos of this trend David Cook observes: "The idea was not imported into American critical discourse until the 1960s, however, when Andrew Sarris[5] christened it "the auteur theory" in an essay in "Film Culture" (1998: 11). He also explains:

> In popular terms, authorship became associated with the work the New American Cinema announced in 1967 by Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*. This sensational film - heavily influenced by the *Cahiers*-inspired French New Wave (in fact, it was originally to have been directed by Truffaut, and after he proved unavailable, by Jean Luc Godard) - took both critics and industry by surprise in its revolutionary mixing of genres and styles and its unprecedented violence (11-12).

Pauline Kael criticizes the idea that a director's distinguishable personality can be fathomed as a "criterion of value" (1963: 12) in the evaluation and appreciation of his/her work. She even pokes fun at the auteur critics, like Sarris, who attempted to gauge an authorial intent from the inconsistency that has characterized some directors' careers. Weaving criticism around the idea of "an élan of the soul" (16), which auteur critics ascribe to some directors (but also use to discriminate against others), Kael draws attention to the idea that auteurism can lapse into a cult of personality, forsaking the ineluctable fact that a director's work reflects not only his or her own ideas and vision but also a system of production that can be constraining, "placing a "hammerlock" (23) on creative élan.

Timothy Corrigan emphasizes the marketing strategies implicit in branding a director an auteur since it guarantees a "relationship between audience and movie whereby an intentional and authorial agency governs, as a kind of brand-name vision whose aesthetic meanings and values have already been determined" (1998: 40). This serves the economic system within which films are produced and marketed to audiences. He adds:

> From its inception auteurism has been bound up with changes in industrial desires, technological opportunities, and marketing strategies. In the United States, for instance, the industrial utility of auteurism from the late 1960s to the early 1970s had

[5] Andrew Sarris wrote "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" for *Film Culture* nº27 (Winter 1962-63), 00-00. The reference was taken from Cook, David. A. 1998. "Auteur Cinema and the Film Generation in 1970s Hollywood in Jon Lewis (ed). *The New American Cinema*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, p: 11.

> much to do with the waning of the American studio system and the subsequent need to find new ways to mark a movie other than with the studio's signature (40).

It seems clear that Peckinpah became a valuable asset for producers who saw in his distinctive style and his glamorized rebel posture a commodity that might generate box-office revenue. Had he been able to conform to their strategic ploys, like his successor John Woo, he would no doubt have been much more successful in economic terms and his career would not have been so irrevocably damaged. Like John Ford, he relied on his own stock-company of actors, who had started within the generic premises of the Western and helped reinforce his ties with the genre. Moreover, he tended to work with the same "bunch" in respect of the editing process, musical score and cinematography. Neil Fulwood states somewhat hyperbolically:

> Sam Peckinpah made films about men. Men who ride together. And he made them in collaboration with men whose loyalty to him was unchallenged. Actors Warren Oates, L.Q. Jones, Strother Martin, John Davis Chandler, R.G. Armstrong, Dub Taylor, Ben Johnson and Slim Pickens, cinematographers Lucien Ballard and John Coquillon, composer Jerry Fielding, editors Louis Lombardo, Robert L Wolfe and Roger Spottiswoode. They were his posse and he the last outlaw, a renegade, a desperado, outliving his time even as he cut a swathe through Hollywood, redefining the way that films would be made (2002: 5).

Fulwood's words express the romanticized version of Peckinpah's directorial persona, clearly underlining the relation of the director/auteur with the celebrity promotion on which Hollywood relies. Although this "posse" helped contribute to his authorial signature, it is an irony that oftentimes producers took the reins in the editing process, butchering the narrative coherence of his direction. This fact alone calls into question the idea of the auteur as a controlling agency by laying bare the economic interventions of the industry. Corrigan states:

> Yet, within the commerce of contemporary film culture, auteurism has become, as both a production and interpretive position, something quite different from what it may have been in the 1950s or 1960s. Since the early 1970s, the commercial conditioning of this figure has successfully evacuated it of most of its expressive power and textual coherency; simultaneously this commercial conditioning has called renewed attention to the layered pressure of auteurism as an agency that establishes

> different modes of identification with its audiences. However vast some of their differences may be, they each, it seems to me, willingly or not, have had to give up their authority as authors and begin to communicate as figures within the commerce of that image (1998: 60).

This might help to explain how Peckinpah, so much a figure of the late 60s and 70s, lost ground when a more juvenile audience was attracted to cinemas by the appeal of the blockbusters made by a new generation of younger directors, film-school graduates and therefore film literate, like Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, who knew how to explore the tastes of adolescent audiences, already detaching themselves from the potential appeal of Western tropes. As Weddle observes regarding the débâcle of *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974):

> The tide had turned against the director. In 1969 Sam Peckinpah had injected his deepest personal conflicts into the framework of the western, and with *The Wild Bunch* addressed a spiritual crisis. His psyche had been perfectly attuned to those of his countrymen, but by 1974 he had fallen out of synch, times had changed. The Vietnam War was winding down to a bleak conclusion, as senseless and frustrating in its end as it had been in its beginning. In another month Richard Nixon would resign from office. Americans would try to shake off the memory of his disgrace, and along with it so many traumatic memories from the most troubled decade since that of the War Between the States. It was time to heal, time to forget. Collective amnesia was the order of the day. *American Graffiti*, directed by a film whiz-kid named George Lucas, had been released the year before and racked up a staggering $55 million at the box office (1996: 496).

About the emergent trend in the Hollywood industry Weddle adds:

> Their mission was to entertain, to make the movies that the Hollywood dream factories had rolled off their assembly lines in the thirties and forties, the kind of movies Hollywood hadn't made for fifteen years or more, ever since Peckinpah's generation had risen to dominance. And the studio heads quickly discovered that these adolescent men made adolescent movies that drew millions of real-life adolescents like flies to sugared water. *Jaws* grosses $50 million more than previous chart-toppers - *The Godfather*, *The Sting*, *The Exorcist* - because teenagers flocked to see it not just once, but five and six times. Those repeated admissions created a whole new genre of movie: the special-effects blockbuster (1996: 501).

Corrigan draws attention to "temporality as a figure of the auteur"(1998: 59) emphasizing how directors like Quentin Tarantino and David Lynch are defined by "the instantaneity of their careers" (59), a characteristic that bespeaks the volatile dimension of consumerism in a post-modern age. And yet, Corrigan also stresses how some directors' careers are predicated on the notion of duration, defying the shifting mores of different temporal contexts. This might shed some light on the interest aroused by Peckinpah's work after his death, hinting at the need to re-inscribe him in a more timeless dimension where his innovative expression has endured and influenced others. Corrigan argues:

> Duration is a distinguishing characteristic of another sort of auteur today - the auteur who creates a figure of time as enduring, evolving within the commerce of its expression. Coppola ultimately might belong and be reclaimed here, as certainly do Martin Scorsese and Robert Altman. *These temporal auteurs demand that we encounter them across the historical vicissitudes of a commercial agency in which they have sometimes faltered, temporal vicissitudes that in today's climate, take on a variety of shapes and figures.* Contemporary auteurs appear "immediately"; they historically "remake themselves"; there are "futuristic" auteurs and "nostalgic" auteurs; some auteurs become identified with the histories of different nationalities and some with the temporalities of different genders. In the final analysis, *the achievement of auteurs today will reflect far more than their individual films and be found in a figure of temporality that their work dramatizes* (1998: 59-60). (my italics)

Peckinpah has certainly endured and resisted time. This may be related not only with the controversial aspects of his work but also with the romantic appeal of his directorial persona.

I have set out to explore those aspects in Peckinpah's work which have not been investigated so thoroughly, those aspects that seem to me to be most valuable and challenging. If there has been a major effort recently to research masculinity, it appears to me that melancholia has been mostly dealt with in feminist analyses which, under Lacanian influences, have centered on psychoanalytic perspectives, perceiving melancholia as deriving from traumatic separation from the mother (as Kristeva and Irigaray emphasize, Schiesari: 1992) and analyzing women's lack against the background of an Oedipal scenario. My aim has been to trace, from the earliest readings of the term up to more contemporary accounts, how melancholia can be deemed a central trope in the way masculinity can be

constructed onscreen, articulating issues of power or/and disempowerment. Here, I hope to have explored Peckinpah's work for its most original and appealing traits. One of my concerns is to evaluate the extent to which Peckinpah's construction of masculinity, touched by melancholia, problematizes the patriarchal assurance which has always been associated with manhood as projected in cinematic images. I have also attempted to investigate how the male body transmits through its debilitation evidence of crisis that is coterminous with the way melancholia is inscribed in and inflected through the body, as early accounts of despondency and grief "without a cause" have attested. In this sense, masculinity acquires a more radical edge inasmuch as it appears "bruised" in its physicality and in its psychic dimension, undermining its claims to an unassailable, universalizing dominance. This, I believe, is the most original aspect of his representation of masculinity. The same premise would later be picked up by Clint Eastwood and elaborated upon in his narratives of ageing and bodily dysfunction.

Stephen Prince is a Peckinpah scholar who has recognized the melancholia that inheres in his work. However, Prince does not expand on the reasons for this, simply putting it down to Peckinpah's nostalgic, backward glance at an irretrievable lost frontier. Although this is relevant, I will contend that Peckinpah's melancholia can be inscribed in trauma, his inability to disengage himself from a sense of loss which, while related with a problematic relation with the maternal, would also be activated throughout his life in cycles of anxiety, guilt and aggression. Object-relation theories like the ones articulated by Freud and later by Melanie Klein seem to offer a felicitous theoretical framework allowing us to delve deeper into the psychic mechanisms that induce melancholy moods and, in Peckinpah's case, self-destructive behavior. In life and in work, Peckinpah seemed to have lived with an intensity which was deeply dangerous for his mental equilibrium and this emerges in his films which become progressively more nihilistic, dramatizing masculinity *in extremis.*

I also attempt to address Peckinpah's misogyny, in contrast to many views which have given it cursory and dismissive treatment. In doing this, I realize how Peckinpah's misogyny could seem disguised by his commitment to male-oriented genres where women seem to have little narrative relevance, and yet their sexual objectification and/or moral diminishment surface in unsavory moments of violence which hint at an uncomfortable resentment

against the feminine. This has sometimes placed me in a difficult position where I acknowledge the artistic value of a director, his innovative stylistic appeal, while at the same time showing how his view of women is rooted in a sexual pathology that seems to harken back to a problematic relation with the maternal. Misogyny can thus be construed as the culminating effect of the binding up of masculinity and melancholia, resulting from ambivalent feelings of hatred and guilt which Freud describes as psychic emanations "from the mental constellation of rejection" (2005 [1917]: 208).

Thus, as has been argued above, Sam Peckinpah had a convoluted career marked by great successes and some spectacular débâcles. Peckinpah's directorial start in the TV Western series[6], *The Rifleman* (1958-1963) and *The Westerner* (1960) for which he wrote and directed some episodes[7], could not be taken into consideration in this project owing to their inaccessibility, although I acknowledge that his work on television helped him mature his professional skills and reinforce his connections with the Western genre. As William Boddy explains, the TV Western provided the ideal ground "for the integration of Hollywood studios and network television in the second half of the 1950s, and the early years of the genre feature the work of both veteran directors (including Budd Boetticher, Lewis Milestone, Sam Fuller and Tay Garnett) and an emerging generation of directors, including Sam Peckinpah and Robert Altman" (Creeber 2001: 14). The TV Western had always been more domestically centred than the film Western and it progressively became more soap-like for financial and scheduling reasons. This helps explain how Peckinpah abandoned TV studios as his infatuation with and exploration of more adult themes was anathema to the more sanitized, family-bound and domestic-centered, television Western.

Peckinpah's much-feted film for television, *Noon Wine* (1966), based on Katherine Ann Porter's short novel, remains inaccessible to public view; the only copy was in the possession of the late Jason Robards, the male protagonist in this film (presumably now his estate). This may be regarded as a hindrance to a more thorough evaluation of his work. He is reputed to have displayed some comic traits in his TV series, which might contrast

[6] Paul Seydor observes: "Most of Peckinpah's television work is unavailable in any format except in syndicated reruns of old series like *Gunsmoke* from its half-hour years, *The Rifleman*, and *The Westerner* (1997: 396).
[7] Marshall Fine points out: "Peckinpah directed five episodes of the series and wrote and co-wrote four of the scripts" (1991: 52).

with the melancholy and elegiac tone of his films. Philip J. Skerry emphasizes the comic elements of *The Westerner* and brings to the fore the way the main character, Dave Blassingame, played by Brian Keith is "a quintessentially human character" (2003: 57), roaming the Western landscape without the veneer of invincibility that characterizes Western heroes. Skerry observes:

> Peckinpah created a series, though, that undercut the epic dimension of the West and that muddied the distinction between good and evil. Peckinpah's main character, Dave Blassingame, is not above adultery, drunkenness, brawling, and lying. In his comic humanity, he foreshadows characters such as Gil Westrum and Cable Hogue (59).

This brief introduction to Peckinpah's work allows us to perceive a director whose creativity seesawed between moments of creative brilliancy and moments where he fell well short of accomplishing his artistic intents. The question whether he developed as an artist from his work on television up to his last film in 1983 seems relevant here, taking into account his relatively short career. I will contend that there is a degree of evolution from the period which ran from *Ride the High Country* to *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*,and that his *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* stands out as an original, albeit profoundly grim, narrative. In this period Peckinpah was able to introduce and hone a radical aesthetic predicated on the visual appeal of stylized set-pieces. This would prepare the ground for the contemporary directors who explore the technical innovations he introduced. As Prince states: "Slow motion, for example, is a ubiquitous means of stylizing gunplay in contemporary films" (230). However, it is apparent that after this period his career declined and he was trapped in an obsessive repetition of the same tropes and themes. His subsequent films dramatize his weary perception of the erosion of male bonding, but evince the diminishment of directorial control which is nonetheless compensated for by interesting insights into a corrupt, alienating social world. There is a disturbing nihilism in his later work, together with a facetious element, which seem to indicate that Peckinpah was not wholeheartedly engaged with his material. *The Osterman Weekend* (1983) was his last film, a jeremiad against television, the hated medium which had given him his start. The idea that audiences are manipulated by its power works as an indictment against the comfortable position

Peckinpah had always criticized in viewers who seek vicarious pleasures in the visual portrayal of violence without reflecting upon it. This was his long-standing moral agenda. More recent action directors have rarely shared this vision since they are interested in the graphic representation of mayhem, from the detachment of a post-modern stance. Prince comments with some disappointment on his legacy:

> Peckinpah's techniques - the squibs, slow motion, and montage editing - have been removed from the contexts in his work that gave them meaning and have, thereby, been rendered superficial and mechanical. The scope of contemporary ultra-violence in cinema that has flowed, or bled, from Peckinpah's work is so vast that an entire book might be devoted to this tradition (230).

What Prince describes as ultra-violent cinema can be traced back to Peckinpah's stylized set-pieces which cannot be dissociated from his moralizing intents. By contrast, contemporary ultra-violence is removed from the anguish and pain, which Peckinpah rooted in a human context, to become an exploitative, highly choreographed, device that purports to stoke the "salacious interest of viewers" (232). Michael Bliss argues that Peckinpah's career, like Ford's, suggests his journey from idealism to disillusionment "with the hoped-for return to idealism held out as a desirable end" (1993: 8). I will argue that disillusionment is there from the beginning, idealism is just a response to existential disenchantment, a stubborn, and hopefully redeeming, attempt to enter one's house justified, as his most honorable character, Steve Judd, had compellingly declared.

II- Methodological concerns

> "Making a picture is…I don't know…you become in love with it. It's part of your life. And when you see it being mutilated and cut to pieces it's like losing a child or something". Sam Peckinpah in an interview with Richard Whitehall, 1969 (Hayes: 49-50)

As has been argued, Peckinpah's *oeuvre* was mainly rehabilitated after his death. During his lifetime the critical assessment of his films centered mostly on their controversial aspects either because they were considered too violent or because their content was too unsavory, as happens with *Straw Dogs* or *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*. Certain authors contributed greatly to giving his films the attention they deserve and those are the object of my attention here. It is worth contextualizing the scathing criticism he has elicited from feminists such as Molly Haskell (Haskell: 1987), Joan Mellen (Mellen: 1978) and even Pauline Kael (Weddle: 1996) who, despite being Peckinpah's personal friend, was also one of his main detractors when films like *Straw Dogs* stirred up polemic and antagonized many female viewers. Peckinpah's work reflects the turbulence of its time and the emergence of the feminist movement was at its most active when it construed his work as a dramatization of male narcissism and a chauvinist, even fascist, posture. As one of the main strands of this thesis is the analysis of the way masculinity is portrayed in Peckinpah's films, it is apparent that this cannot be dissociated from feminist theorization. Masculinity studies came into being when feminists rendered manhood "visible" and challenged the phallocentric postulates which have secured its universalizing status. Accordingly, as the main premises underlying this thesis were developed, the work of feminist critics was incorporated insofar as their critical reasoning would highlight the thin veneer of patriarchal authority which the Western - *par excellence* Peckinpah's privileged genre - has always projected. Moreover, the relationship between men and feminism is grounded in a historical moment when men were prodded into recognizing that their position of dominance and privilege implied the social and political exclusion of women, and that prompted the need to reflect upon assumptions of patriarchal power. Back in the late 80s, Stephen Heath in his introductory text to *Men in Feminism* (1987) stated that "men's relation to feminism is an impossible one" (1) since, despite any sympathy for or engagement they may have with feminist struggles, they are always already the object of

their socio-political belligerence, their ongoing commitment to change, and have never experienced oppression, as the insidious form of sexual domination that women have routinely experienced. As he argues:

> Men are the objects, part of the analysis, agents of the structure to be transformed, representatives in, carriers of the patriarchal mode; and my desire to be a subject there too in feminism - to be a feminist - is then only the last feint in the long list of their colonization (1).

Rosi Braidotti, advocating a sexual-difference theory that highlights women's assymetrical relationship with the masculine, argues that one should talk about men in "pheminism" (2011: 264) rather than men in feminism since the phallic legacy of the universalist, humanist and male-centered discourses of western thought places men in a privileged, non-commitment position regarding women's embodied, lived experiences and their struggles. And yet, what seems interesting in Peckinpah's *oeuvre* is that it posits this problematic relationship between men and feminism in a startling, unforeseen way. This is mainly achieved through a destabilization of men's bodily integrity that threatens ontological security and constantly undermines its claims to unassailability. For all its antagonizing of feminist views, Peckinpah's work elicits a fruitful questioning of masculinity, which emerges in his films more vulnerable than he might have wanted to project. Drawing upon the work of R.W. Connell - whose theory I will address in part two - Michael Schwalbe argues that the concept of masculinity is not static but implies fluidity and change perceived through a dynamic relation with social and cultural constructions. Schwalbe relies on the notion of manhood acts, the "doing" of masculinity which is embedded in a "repertoire of signifying acts" (2014: 56). Only by analyzing the discursive practices which reinforce the idea of hegemonic masculinity can we disclose how manhood is so tied up with a set of signifiers that are linked with the male body. As Schwalbe avers: "A male body can thus be called a *peremptory signifier*. When it comes to eliciting attributions of possessing a masculine self, a male body is an asset; a female body a liability" (62). What Peckinpah's work undermines is the idea that the configuration of masculinity, aligned with its discursive and representational practices, is *effortless*, which would thereby entail a seemingly unproblematic claim to supremacy based on mastery and control.

Peckinpah unwittingly brings into relief the fragile constructed-ness on which manhood acts capitalize, unmooring masculinity from domination. For, as Schwalbe states, "Exertions of control have greater signifying power if they appear effortless" (61). In Peckinpah's male universe, the struggle to achieve a credible masculinity is apparent and the efforts painstakingly visible.

Exploring feminist theorization was then one of the methodological concerns in this work inasmuch as it allowed me to uncover masculine anxiety and its disturbing effect in what Kaja Silverman calls the dominant fiction, that is, the fiction that secures the "collective make-believe in the commensurability of penis and phallus" (1992: 15). Moreover, I have made inroads into an area that has had philosophical and psychoanalytical impact. Since melancholia constitutes one of the main structuring axes in this work, Juliana Schiesari's *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (1992) was the first important source to allow me to make associations with film studies and the way melancholia is projected through masculine constructions. Although the work is mainly concerned with literature, it prepared the ground for my further analyses and allowed me to discover other authors whose studies on melancholia and its historical trajectory have been influential. Intent on showing how cinema has apprehended this "mood" and has also connoted it differently in gender terms, I realized that Peckinpah's films dramatize a pervasively melancholy stance which problematizes notions of male self-sufficiency and authority. Although Freudian theorization was fruitful in my melancholia section, I have preferred to avoid the expected conceptual framework of male castration anxieties to explore misogyny, despite the long-held belief, grounded in Freud's seminal work, that sexual difference, women's lack, ignites subconscious fears of the female "dark continent". Calvin Thomas has argued that the invisibility of men's bodies has guaranteed the preservation of phallic authority and has installed masculinity "on the active and proper side" (1996: 28), staving off elements of abjection that might destabilize the *corps propre* (28) of men's phallic wholeness.This also accords with Jane Gallop's view when she observes that men's inroads into a "critical thinking connected to the body" (1988: 7) is both harder and easier when compared to women's: "Harder because men have their masculine identity to gain by being estranged

from their bodies and dominating the bodies of others. Easier because men are more able to venture into the realm of the body without being trapped there" (7).

As I have sought to prove, by drawing upon other contemporary films, misogyny results from a fear of losing control over "heterosexist, white male hegemony" (Thomas: 28), thus masculinity is rendered in its most hysterical incontinence always already besieged by the fear of its dissolution, the shattering of the phallicized egos on which it has relied. In a way, male castration anxieties have always been coterminous with what Thomas defines as "phallus-friendly" (27) since they have positioned masculine subjectivities in a scenario where they overcome anxiety by seeing the other, femaleness, as incomplete, displaying lack and hence achieving - and reproducing - their places in a final, foreclosing, "phallic coherence" (27). Bearing this in mind, my methodological concerns in respect of misogyny rely on the notion that it entails psychic defense mechanisms which, rooted in anxiety and in the fear of emasculation, take on the form - as in Peckinpah's case - of aggression and a perceived imbalance underlying heterosexual relations. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993) Judith Butler, in similar reasoning to that of Thomas, argues that the bodies "that matter" are always subject to regulatory practices that tend to exclude the bodies that do not matter since those posit the possibility of disrupting the boundaries and the fixity on which materialized, sexed bodies are stabilized. Like Thomas, she perceives the abject as threatening the subject, constituting "those "unlivable", and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject" (3). I therefore attempt to prove that Peckinpah flirted, as it were, with bodies that "do not matter" by turning their materiality into a site of anxiety expressed in the loosening of boundaries, the abject that looms large whenever ageing, bodily debilitation and sexual dysfunction come to the fore. In that sense, violence always assumes the ultimate form of bodily threat through fragmentation and the dissolving of its material corporeality - thus the ostensible vision of spurts of blood - and thereby the attendant shattering of the dominant fictions. These have been my methodological concerns and the theoretical thread which I hope has helped me connect three areas that seem so important - and challenging - in Peckinpah's body of work.

III- Review of Literature

> "Take him Lord, but knowing Cable, I suggest you do not take him lightly."
> Reverend Joshua (David Warner)'s funeral oration in *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970)

I will confine this review only to the books, and some articles, that deal with Peckinpah's work and life since the literature on masculinity, melancholia and misogyny will be tackled in the early sections of subsequent chapters. First, I will focus on the three biographies that explore his life and career insofar as they have served to rehabilitate his name and revive interest in his cinematic legacy. These biographies have become influential in analyses which read Peckinpah's *oeuvre* in the light of his own life vicissitudes. After addressing these works, I will focus on the studies, in chronological order, which have foregrounded important aspects of Peckinpah's films and which directly or indirectly have had some impact on the making and development of this thesis.

Marshall Fine's *Bloody Sam*: *The Life and Films of Sam Peckinpah* (1991) focuses on biographical facts with respect to Peckinpah's life and career, tracing the often difficult production processes of his movies. Fine does not attempt to explore film content but gives a full account of the arduous processes which threatened Peckinpah's directorial control inasmuch as he usually worked at cross purposes with producers. Fine divides his book into different time periods, allowing the reader to construct Peckinpah's career sequentially. Fine also intersperses his narration with film reviews published in response to Peckinpah's films, which gives an interesting view of the often quite contrasting reactions to his films.

David Weddle's *Sam Peckinpah: If They Move…kill'Em* (1996) is a comprehensive biography of Peckinpah which covers his personal life but also the development of his career as a film director from his formative work on television to his involvement in film direction. Weddle's biography traces Peckinpah's life events and professional trajectory, relating many of Peckinpah's personal obsessions to his family and social background. Weddle's book remains one of the most useful sources for this thesis since it deepens insight into Peckinpah's conception of masculinity and his contradictory position regarding women. Weddle's biography has also constituted useful background for other studies which have

relied on its information to tap into specific areas such as Peckinpah's knowledge of tragedy as a literary genre or his awareness of existentialist authors. Weddle's view is somewhat interventive though, since his appreciation of Peckinpah's work leads him to upbraid the moneymen who maimed his films and even subtly criticize those who pandered to his addictions like his loyal prop man Robert Visciglia, always ready to provide Peckinpah with fuel for his dependencies. These are details which do not impair the reliability and thoroughness of his account but rather contribute to creating a lively portrait of the people who surrounded Peckinpah and with whom he often worked.

Whilst apparently following on the coattails of the previous two works referenced above Garner Simmons's *Peckinpah: A Portrait in Montage* (1998) emphasizes that his book should not be construed as a biography but rather as a portrait which progressively grew out of Simmons's personal acquaintance with Peckinpah and the experience of accompanying the director and his crew on many of their location shoots, including those in Mexico. Although the title suggests that Simmons might be exploring Peckinpah's ingenuity with camera work, he uses the word "montage" metaphorically inasmuch as the work proposes a "composite picture of both director and his work from multiple perspectives" (xxix). The intention is to provide the reader "with a valid portrait of a man amid his complexities, a creative sensibility in conflict with a commercial medium" (xxix). By casting light on Peckinpah's troubled life and his inability to kowtow to producers, Simmons also traces his decline as a man and artist, lamenting his physical and emotional disintegration. Although Simmons's work provides many interesting details, primarily concerned with the obstacles encountered during location shooting, the casting of actors and Peckinpah's psychological instability, the work runs the risk of becoming too emotionally engaged and therefore, while possessing a certain charm, it does not make a major contribution to the issues I am dealing with.

Jim Kitses's *Horizons West: Studies in Authorship within the Western* written in 1969 under the influence of *auteurism* asserts his desire "to rescue three talented men from the neglect forced upon them" (7). Accordingly, his book covers the work of three Western directors - Budd Boetticher, Anthony Mann and Sam Peckinpah. Interestingly, right from

the outset, Kitses puts forward his own view on auteur theory in the following contextualization:

> In my view the term describes a basic principle and a method, no more and no less: the idea of personal authorship in the cinema and - of key importance - the concomitant responsibility to honour all of a director's works by a systematic examination in order to trace characteristic themes, structures and formal qualities (7).

The edition focused upon is the first one published by the British Film Institute. Accordingly, it is significant that Peckinpah at this stage - when he had just released *The Wild Bunch* - was being regarded as a director with a coherent body of work wherein his directorial imprint could already be perceived. Kitses analyses *Ride the High Country, Major Dundee,* and *The Wild Bunch,* stressing how Peckinpah insists on questions of self-knowledge as a form of redemption for his tarnished heroes. What appears most relevant in this work is Kitses's perception of Peckinpah's distinctive style, the emphasis he puts on his attention to detail, and on the evocative imagery he creates. Moreover, despite the fact that the *The Wild Bunch's* release was still eliciting controversy, Kitses analyzed the film for its technical originality and narrative density, avoiding the overcharged criticisms leveled at its depiction of violence. In addition, as will be seen, Kitses returns to Peckinpah in 2004 with a refashioned, up-dated edition which covers the remaining films of his work and elaborates upon many other aspects.

Max Evans's *Sam Peckinpah: Master of Violence, being the account of the making of a movie and other sundry things* (1972) is an entertaining report on the making of *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* in which Evans, Peckinpah's personal friend, plays a small role as one of the stagecoach drivers teaming up with Slim Pickens. The book does not aim at reading the film but rather at being a detailed account of the difficult location shoot in the Nevada desert and the tribulations that the cast and crew went through. Evans's account cannot help but be more than usually biased: his description of Peckinpah's brawling, ill-tempered personality helps strengthen the glamorized view of the director as a rebellious maverick. Moreover, Evans brings into focus other interesting personalities such as Jason Robards

and David Warner, the former described as a knife-throwing, temperamental heavy drinker and the latter a shy introvert with a pathological fear of the desert landscape. The book is, therefore, a chronicle of the "horror or joy" (1) of working with Peckinpah and its title an allusion to the violence - psychological and even physical due to the harsh conditions in which most location shootings were held - that somehow this experience seems to have entailed.

Published in 1979, Terence Butler's *Crucified Heroes: The Film of Sam Peckinpah*, does not deal with the last of Peckinpah's movies, made a year before his death, *The Osterman Weekend*, and only deals with *Convoy* in a postscript coda. Butler enlarges upon Peckinpah's connections with the Western by weaving some considerations around the work of other directors who also worked within the genre, such as John Ford, Howard Hawks, William Wellman and Raoul Walsh. He dwells on generic premises with broad brush strokes, not concentrating too deeply on any of these directors but raising questions which open the way for exploring Peckinpah's work in relation to the prominent or dominant contrasts rooted in the genre. The idea that civilization can be constraining, the destruction of the wilderness as a mythic space of freedom, the waning of the frontier and the encroachment of progress on heroes' rugged individualism are all addressed by Butler. Moreover, his work shows how sexuality in the Western is rife with Oedipal anxieties, in such a way that women posit a menacing presence, threatening men with emasculation. In Peckinpah's films, Butler acknowledges, women are always rendered in a very physical way but this represents only a brief respite for male fantasies. His considerations are thus apposite for addressing melancholia and misogyny.

Paul Seydor's *Sam Peckinpah's The Western Films: A Reconsideration* (1997) is perhaps the most oft-cited of any film commentary or criticism concerning Sam Peckinpah's Western films. This book is pivotal for understanding Peckinpah's strong ties with the Western genre and the way his films are heavily influenced by the generic inflections and tonal subtleties of Western iconography. This work also sheds light on his construction of masculinity and on his recurrent thematic concerns. Moreover, Seydor inscribes Peckinpah in a long line of artists whose work transmits the need to vindicate a masculine ethos and which reflects American emblematic dependence on frontier mythology. Seydor considers that Peckinpah

can be compared with Hemingway (along with other authors like Melville, Emerson or Hawthorne) since their artistic expression reveals an anxious need to legitimize manhood in the face of many emasculating forces. Hemingway is given a special relevance in Seydor's comparison since, like Peckinpah himself, he had a problematic relationship with his mother, resenting her overwhelming influence on the family. This fact led both artists to assert themselves in relation to the "feminizing" pull of the maternal realm, something which was mainly played out through the endorsement of a flamboyant macho posture.

In *Peckinpah's Tragic Heroes: A Critical Study* (1984) John L. Simons and Robert Merrill try to prove that Peckinpah's heroes, for all their flaws, are akin to tragic heroes. Relying on testimony from his first wife, Marie Selland, who claimed Peckinpah was familiar with Aristotle's *Poetics* and avidly read Shakespearean tragedies, this study attempts to read Peckinpah's works as tragedies and presents an explanatory framework, invoking different descriptions of what a tragedy might be, which establishes similarities between Peckinpah's blemished, invariably doomed, protagonists and the tarnished nature of tragic heroes. Simons and Merrill compare Peckinpah's films to other Westerns like Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952) George Stevens's *Shane* (1953), John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), or even to a significant number of Anthony Mann's films, but conclusively reinforce the idea that tragedy is more strongly felt in Peckinpah's heroes inasmuch as they always undergo "permanent and irreversible" (20) damage. This work explores in detail what the authors consider to be tragic elements in *Ride the High Country, The Wild Bunch*, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*. Although it has not had a strong impact on my thesis, it confirms how Peckinpah dwelled so much on a damaged image of masculinity, making his male protagonists grieve over lost opportunities and come up against *cul-de-sac* situations which often entrap them. This has prepared the ground for establishing some connections between the situations described and Peckinpah's construction of a troubled masculinity.

In *Justified lives: Morality and Narrative in the Films of Sam Peckinpah* (1993) Michael Bliss offers an in-depth analysis of Peckinpah's films, following them in chronological order. His introduction also reinforces Peckinpah's connections with the Western genre focusing on seminal critical works like Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the American

Frontier in American History" (1893) to reiterate how the frontier posited a geographical and symbolical dimension, evoking a "panoply of ideas concerning ambition, desire and renewal" (2). Accordingly, Bliss confirms how many of the oppositions in Western narratives stem from the myths found in early Western literature and the way these works envisioned the border as a physical and spiritual place that promises renewal and transcendence. He points out how the Western suggests the nation's "satisfying need for spiritual self-justification" (8) to compensate for a sense of loss, even when that trajectory is mapped out in the repression of racial otherness or in the suppression of sexual, "instinctual behaviors" (9). Bliss argues that "Western directors like Ford and Peckinpah would also go through a spiritual progression paralleling that of the nation as a whole, "describing the arc from idealism (e.g. *Stagecoach* and *Ride the High Country*) to disillusionment (e.g *Cheyenne Autumn* and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*)" (8). Moreover, the title of the book draws upon Steve Judd's famous line "All I want is to enter my house justified" suggesting that, despite the predicaments and moral dilemmas they often face, Peckinpah's heroes have a code of their own, which purports to give an ethical dimension to their apparently amoral acts.

Bliss's book is noteworthy in many aspects but his reading of Elsa in *Ride the High Country* does not accord with my view of the character. He argues that Elsa is responsible for all the negative events that happen as soon as she elopes from home, "setting in motion all the subsequent deadly machinery" (45). Bliss considers that it is Elsa, through her sexuality, "who rules over the majority of the film's conflicts" (45), vindicating the notion that women represent a danger to male bonding and hinting at a misogynistic fear of the female as a disruptive, unruly force. Moreover, his view that in *Straw Dogs* Amy's narrative relevance is restricted since the film is "primarily interested in its male characters" (142) seems to dismiss the fact that in this case Amy is the one who ignites all the violence in the film through the anxiety, fear and insecurity that her powerful sexual presence arouses in all the unbalanced males in the film. She is right at the heart of the narrative and sets in motion the troubling expression of its male characters' infatuation with physical and sexual violence.

Michael Bliss's interest in Peckinpah's work is further confirmed by hs edition of a volume of essays: *Doing it Right: The Best Criticism on Sam Peckinpah's* The Wild Bunch (1994). In the introduction to this compilation, he dedicates this work to Paul Seydor for his important role in reappraising Peckinpah's films. The book comprises a variety of essays which analyze Peckinpah's groundbreaking film from many different perspectives. That the film has aroused so much critical work attests to its importance in the history of film making. As Bliss suggests in his introduction, "Nowhere else in Peckinpah's work does there exist such a powerful and effective meeting of form and content, stylistics and theme, casting and character" (xv). *Doing it Right* also introduces an interesting discussion over the various versions of *The Wild Bunch,* since cuts were made after the film's first preview. This was regarded as a backstabbing act which led Peckinpah to be at loggerheads with his producer Phil Feldman over the sloppy way the cuts were made. Moreover, Bliss's volume also includes essays from a variety of Peckinpah's devotees from Robert Culp to Stephen Farber, Jim Kitses to Paul Schrader, all of them exploring different aspects of the film. Peckinpah's strong ties with Mexico, the epic dimension of his film, his capacity for story-telling and his fondness for his characters' idiosyncratic quirks are aspects which come into play in the essays. Michael Sragow's epilogue constitutes a beautifully written text, paying homage to Peckinpah's enduring work. It is significant that such a controversial film director could still arouse such a moving tribute.

Stephen Prince's *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies* (1998) is perhaps one of the most thought-provoking books in this selection. It does not reject the idea that violence appealed to Peckinpah. In fact, it recognizes that the virtuosity he deployed in the construction of violent scenarios teeters on fetishism, having little contact with the sanitized Western renditions of bloodshed heretofore represented in cinema. However, what Prince underlines is that Peckinpah's violence is always fraught with ambiguity and misgivings often bringing into focus the pain and anguish it causes to characters' lives. Accordingly, Prince anticipates some of the ideas to be developed in this thesis insofar as Peckinpah's work is apprehended not so much for its aestheticized violent flair - although this is not dismissed - but rather for its melancholy and the way this provides for alternative, essentially subversive, masculine images. Moreover, Prince analyzes with

great depth and acuity the montage processes which have characterized Peckinpah's work, bringing to the fore the way montage signals narrative purpose and characters' states of mind. He also explores how Peckinpah's slow motion technique interspersed with real time set-pieces led to a disjunctive, fractured construction of space and time which can be traced back to Arthur Penn and Akira Kurosawa (*Rashomon,* 1950*,* and *The Seven Samurai,* 1954). Prince's *Savage Cinema* is thus a valuable source for understanding Peckinpah's idiosyncrasies in terms of montage and editing. His work with multi-camera shooting and the different angles he captured in a single moment bear out his virtuoso, directorial control. In the last chapter, Prince also establishes connections between Peckinpah's portrayal of violence and contemporary film makers who might be indebted to the slow motion *Peckinpahesque* style. However, Prince argues that directors like Quentin Tarantino, John Woo or Paul Verhoeven have borrowed from Peckinpah's "visual grammar and syntax" (230) but have turned them into an empty, mechanized display of gore.

Bernard F. Dukore's *Peckinpah's Feature Films* (1999) elaborates upon Peckinpah's underlying existentialist themes. The first chapter of this book "What he did" draws upon a famous line from *The Wild Bunch* in which the chief bank clerk berates a young teller with the harsh admonition: "I don't care what you meant to do, it's what you did that I don't like"; this line serves as a metaphor for Peckinpah's position regarding the controversial features of his work. In fact, "what he did" has been the object of admonition. From this starting point, Dukore offers a somewhat contrived analysis which purports to establish relations between Peckinpah's heroes and Camus and Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist works. Drawing on his first wife (Marie Selland)'s testimony, where she argued that Peckinpah read voraciously and was acquainted with existentialist authors, Dukore elaborates on this by construing Peckinpah's protagonists' emotional entanglements, quandaries and crises as dramatizations of existentialist dilemmas. The book reaffirms the complexity of Peckinpah's narratives, unveiling aspects which raise philosophical concerns but, in my view, it falls short of presenting strong evidence of the relationship between Camus or Sartre's work and Peckinpah's *oeuvre*. Dukore focuses mainly on *The Flies* (1943) and *No Exit* (1944) by Sartre and on Camus's *The Stanger* (1942), *The Rebel* (1951) and *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1955). After exploring some issues raised by these works, especially the

emphasis on the responsibility of choice and the way the individual defines himself/herself through his/her actions, Dukore goes on to prove how in each of Peckinpah's films the protagonists take responsibility for their actions and even when those actions imply their eventual death, they assert their freedom and vindicate their individual subjectivity against a backdrop of diminished expectations and hopes. The second part is a detailed analysis of Peckinpah's editing style, bearing in mind set-pieces from *The Wild Bunch* (the first and final violent tableaux) and *Straw Dogs* (the siege of Amy and David's place). This second part encompasses an exhaustive analysis of Peckinpah's technical artistry and, albeit detailed and thorough, I did not find it particularly relevant since Peckinpah's montage technique is largely beyond the scope of this thesis.

Bill Mesce Jr's *Peckinpah's Women: A Reappraisal of Women in the Period Westerns of Sam Peckinpah* (2001) is the only book devoted to analyzing women in Peckinpah's Westerns. It must therefore deal with the accusations of misogyny that were levelled against the director, especially during his lifetime. Mesce Jr places himself in a predicament whereby his fondness for Peckinpah's work leads him to offer an apologia for his "misdemeanors" (xvii). His defence is perhaps somewhat flawed. He argues that compared with the underlying racism of D.W.Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) Peckinpah's misogyny seems a minor flaw. However, he cannot completely embrace a detached position regarding Peckinpah's turbulent life and work. In the introduction to the book, Mesce Jr poses a question which appears relevant: "How does one separate one's outrage over a film's content from one's judgment over the piece as a creative work?" (xvi). This has also been an object of my reflection and chimes in with my own discomfort with Peckinpah's portrayal of violence against women and with his many unsavory and disparaging comments regarding the female sex. And yet, I do appreciate his creativity and his artistry, I am touched by his nostalgic longing and the pervasive melancholy of his films. Mesce Jr's words struck a chord in my own attempts to calibrate Peckinpah's aesthetic value and my painfully "digested" realization that his view of women was oftentimes negative and skewed. However well-intentioned Mesce Jr's reappraisal is, it reflects nonetheless the same urge to see Peckinpah's misogyny as embedded in its own historical times, making him a victim of the emergence of the Women's Liberation

Movement and a prey to the media's need to scapegoat him. On some occasions, his view conforms to that of other authors - Fulwood's for example - by disavowing misogyny completely and stating that "it is not that Peckinpah's films show the director with a low opinion of women, but with a low opinion of mankind in general" (125). Moreover, he also puts forward the argument of equivalence, or "democratic" gender treatment, in that women, especially in *The Wild Bunch,* can be as fallible and morally soiled as men. Peckinpah's vision is thus compared with that of Robert Aldrich who, quoted by Mesce Jr, said about women: "Long before liberation, I thought they were to be reckoned with. They are not docile, they are not subservient, they are not secondary citizens. They kill you as much as you kill them" (123). In a similar vein, Mesce Jr underscores how women in Peckinpah's films emerge as more mature than men, who are often prone to what he defines as "rampant male madness" (143).

As the only book dedicated entirely to Peckinpah's female characters, *Peckinpah's Women* falls short of establishing a conclusive powerful argument on the issue, treating the subject dismissively. This is further borne out by the way Mesce Jr considers *The Getaway* as just an escapist fantasy and is unable to expound on the film's central issue, that of masculine anxiety over the threat of emasculation represented by women's unreliable nature. Notably, he treats *Straw Dogs*, maybe the most complex portrayal of heterosexual relations in all of Peckinpah's films, in a cursory, hurried way - his treatment of the film takes up only half a page - and Amy is not given the in-depth analysis she deserves in so complex and disturbing a narrative. In the last chapter, he also criticizes the feminist movement for being beset by fragmentation and lack of consensus as to how to achieve its own goals, something which has made its cultural and socio-political impact moot. In this scenario, Mesce Jr argues that Peckinpah was misperceived and constantly misconstrued in his intentions and the derision to which he was subjected did not take into account his embedding in the "larger context of the industry" (160). Apropos of one of the final scenes in *The Wild Bunch*, in which Pike had spent some time with a Madonna-like prostitute, Mesce Jr states: "Even a whore can produce life - because women are life - and evidences that fact here at the moment when Pike realizes he and his companions have no life left" (124). The platitude of women as "life" and the implicit notion that prostitutes belong to a lower status of

humankind but *even so* they can be purveyors of life as well, is profoundly condescending and hackneyed.

Neil Fulwood's *The Films of Sam Peckinpah* (2002) starts by introducing some biographical facts about Peckinpah's life and then goes on to explore in chronological order all of Peckinpah's films. What distinguishes it from others in a related vein is that Fulwood summarizes the plot before offering his own analysis of content. He does this by foregrounding character construction and motivation, the complexity which frames human relations in Peckinpah's films and the carefully rendered technical virtuosity. Like many accounts of Peckinpah's career, Fulwood underscores his intense and anxiety-ridden life. Despite this, Fulwood's book in its last chapter - entitled "Is Peckinpah a misogynist?" - rejects Peckinpah's association with misogyny and by dint of an oversimplified analysis presents some arguments that reappraise what he deems to be an unfairly acquired reputation. In fact, Fulwood argues that Peckinpah's treatment of women is grounded in a "democracy" where men and women are often subjects and objects of violence on equal terms, and that his recurrent use of prostitutes stems also from historic imperatives and the urge to seek authenticity. Moreover, he dismisses Peckinpah's obsession with rape scenes by arguing that they are always justified by "narrative purposes" and each time a rape or attempted rape is foregrounded it reflects the director's concern with narrative plausibility and may even serve, as in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, "metaphorical reasons"(151). Although Fulwood does not explain what this metaphor signifies, I gather it must be a metaphor for the punishment a female character's open sexuality may elicit in Peckinpah's strongly male universe. Fulwood's approach represents the value-laden, and romanticized, perspective that has so often clouded critics' judgment in relation to Peckinpah's work.

Jim Kitses's *Horizons West: Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood* (2004) places Peckinpah along with other important Western directors, from the more classical John Ford, Anthony Mann and Budd Boetticher to the revisionist Westerns of Sergio Leone and the more contemporary work of Clint Eastwood. Kitses first published *Horizons West: Studies in Authorship within the Western* in 1969, as mentioned above, where he had already vindicated Peckinpah as an auteur, emphasizing the unique technical style and the

sense of thematic consistency his filmography displays. He returns to Peckinpah with this updated *Horizons West* and, in the chapter dedicated to the director, entitled "Sam Peckinpah: the Savage Eye", Kitses brings into focus Peckinpah's obsession with male bonding, always threatened by a world of change where progress signifies loss of authenticity and an erosion of human relations. He also casts light on Peckinpah's religious tropes, his many Bible references rooted in his family background and his religious upbringing. By providing an insight into Peckinpah's Westerns, Kitses's work has been extremely valuable in the development of this thesis, since masculinity takes center stage in his understanding of Peckinpah's particular vision of the Western, perceived through his "savage eye" and through a body of work which is fiercely and nostalgically attached to a code of honor impossible to uphold. Moreover, Kitses recognizes that one of Peckinpah's main failures was to be so obsessed with an "unbalanced manhood" (203) that he was incapable of endowing women with anything more than a corporeal quality.

Leonard Engel's edition of *Sam Peckinpah's West: New Perspectives*, published in 2003, has the advantage of bringing together a series of essays which, albeit focusing on Peckinpah's recurrent Western tropes, addresses new issues raised by many of his films, some of them not so well-explored and even dismissed in minor works such as *The Killer Elite* (1975) and *Convoy* (1978). I found this volume useful in the way it treats some areas which have not been so thoroughly addressed such as Philip J. Skerry's approach to Peckinpah's TV series *The Westerner*, or even Elaine Marshall's exploration of *Convoy*. Engle's essay "Who Are You?" "That's a Good Question": Shifting Identities in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*" centers on the character played by Bob Dylan, Alias, in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and casts some light on the role some have considered a riddle in the narrative. Armando José Prats's exploration of *Ride the High Country* is a resourceful study of a film where Peckinpah already shows signs of social disenchantment but is still far from the nihilism which his later work will display. Prats suggests how Peckinpah posits, through the obsolescence of his aging heroes, a world depleted of idealism and driven by materialistic values, a theme that will be recuperated in Peckinpah's subsequent work. Moreover, the essays by Richard Hudson and Stephen Tatum, respectively on *Junior Bonner* and *The Getaway,* offer acute insights into both films and underline Peckinpah's nostalgia and his view of family ties,

something rarely focused upon (in *Junior Bonner*) and male anxiety over a more prominent female character and the specter of betrayal in heterosexual relations (as in *The Getaway*). Since the aforementioned films will be the object of analysis in this work, this volume has been very fruitful. By including essays from a variety of younger scholars, it also offers a fresher look at his work and affirms its continuing value in the area of film studies.

Gabrielle Murray's *This Wounded Cinema, This Wounded Life: Violence and Utopia in the Films of Sam Peckinpah* (2004) stands out as the first lengthy analysis of Peckinpah's work written by a woman (leaving aside the many reviews that Pauline Kael wrote during Peckinpah's life-time). This work falls short of its ambition to explore Peckinpah's work in its "wounded" dimension, the wounds recalling more the way studios bowdlerized his films than anything intrinsic to Peckinpah himself. Murray conjures up philosophical and even sociological explanations which adumbrate Peckinpah's complexity and ends up concentrating more on the claim of Peckinpah's life-affirming propensities - which is really quite questionable if we consider his self-destructive behavior and his interest in portraying death as a bloody, ugly affair. By binding up Peckinpah's *oeuvre* with authors like Edgar Morin and Heraclitus and drawing upon a sociological approach which traces violence to cathartic rituals, Murray foregrounds Peckinpah's energy and kinetic strength - drawing attention to the *fiestas* of his romanticized Mexico – and dismissing the disturbing nihilism which his films oftentimes project. This approach seems less than useful except in its general understanding of his work and in its attempt to disclose an energetic flow in his narratives that are often associated with a vitalistic view of Mexico. Moreover, the discourse used is value-laden and emotionally charged, verging on the sentimental as can be attested by the readings of *Junior Bonner* or even *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia,* where Murray insists on Elita's earthy, life-engendering nature to the point of sickening exhaustion. Since it is the only work written by a woman, it is frustrating in its obfuscation of Peckinpah's misogyny. In fact, Murray simplifies the issue by claiming that Peckinpah did not give women the same opportunities for adventure as he gave men and that, according to her reading, it is less a question of misogyny than the single consequence of narrative plausibility and generic impositions.

Kevin Hayes's edition of *Sam Peckinpah's Interviews*, published in 2008, remains an important source for any exploration of the director's work. In his introduction to this compilation of interviews given by Peckinpah at different times in his career, Hayes writes that "Peckinpah's interviews offer a vivid portrait of the man and his work. The collected interviews also function as a kind of biography in his own words" (2008: viii). The interviews are punctuated by Peckinpah's personal insights into his films, his acknowledgement that his projects were often undercut by producers and also his views on many of the questions raised about his films by viewers and critics: on violence, sexuality, male angst. Hayes also warns us against the pitfall of taking Peckinpah's words too literally: "The bravado he often conveys may have been affected for the benefit of his interviewers and their readers" (viii). That Peckinpah often indulged in exhibitionism and enjoyed upsetting his detractors with his "cowboy panache" is a consensual view of him, one equally evident in Weddle's biography. However, when not adopting the façade of masculine bravado, Peckinpah could provide important information about his films and the ideological and existential concerns they embody. Accordingly, these collected interviews are a useful source of information, substantiating a number of observations in this work.

With *Peckinpah Today: New Essays on the Films of Sam Peckinpah*, published in 2012, Michael Bliss confirms his enduring interest in Peckinpah's *oeuvre* and his status as director/auteur. As with the essays on *The Wild Bunch*, Michael Bliss gathered a collection of essays on some of Peckinpah's least studied and explored films like *The Deadly Companions*, *The Killer Elite*, *Cross of Iron*, and his last film *The Osterman Weekend*. Garner Simmons's reappraisal of *The Deadly Companions* is an example of how a disregarded film such as this one - Peckinpah dismissed it as an encumbrance since his control was constantly compromised by producer FitzSimons - might prefigure many of Peckinpah's subsequent motifs and offers glimpses of his visual aesthetics. Paul Seydor's essay "The Authentic Death and Contentious Afterlife of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*: The Several Versions of Peckinpah's Last Western" is a thorough study of the studio cuts which maimed and truncated the film, marring its integrity. Although studio interference is not one of the main strands of analysis in this thesis, Seydor traces subsequent painstaking attempts to restore the film to what may be regarded as "the director's cut" and his study remains a

valuable source for understanding one of Peckinpah's most wounded works. As this film will be central to exploring melancholia, the reading of this essay has also raised interesting questions about the erratic shooting process that the film underwent, transmitting to some extent how Peckinpah's life was at this stage plagued by the same angst that affected his character, Pat Garrett.

Max Evans was one of Peckinpah's closest friends and after his death he was in possession of a whole range of stories which might have been channeled into a biography. However, confronted with the fact that Weddle had already acquired the family's legal authorization to write about Peckinpah's life and career, Evans at a later stage in his life decided to narrate many of the incidents, events and "the truly wildass times" (2) he had with Peckinpah and their mutual friends and acquaintances in a book which he wanted to be very personal. *Goin' Crazy with Sam Peckinpah and all our Friends* (2014) by Max Evans as told by Robert Nott results from this life-long relationship. With advancing age and not knowing whether he would be able to finish it, he hired Nott to write it down. The book chronicles entertaining situations and testifies to Peckinpah's contradictory, sometimes exasperating, personality which eventually alienated many of his associates but also secured some life-time friendships. Chapters like "Everyone wanted to meet Sam, until they met him" or "The Night I tried to kill Sam Peckinpah" can pique one's curiosity and constitute funny accounts of Peckinpah's unpredictable behavior which, oftentimes induced by booze or cocaine, could border on the surreal. The book also addresses Peckinpah's interest in many of Evans's books, which he often optioned to turn into film scripts. His life-long interest in *The Hi-Lo-Country* is well known and Evans narrates humorously how Peckinpah coveted that work throughout his life, even signing contracts on paper napkins, but he never got to make it into a film. Only much later would the English Stephen Frears direct the film which had been an object of Peckinpah's directorial desire for so many years, mostly because it deals with a West in transition, a theme which resonates through his *oeuvre* as well. Evans also includes in this work a very compelling interview with Katherine Haber, Peckinpah's production assistant with whom he had an exploitative and unstable romantic liaison for a long time. Haber's account of what she had to endure over the many years in which she supported Peckinpah in his work and also in

surviving many of his existential, and health, crises contributes to the depiction of a very emotionally unsteady man. Her testimony is important in helping to characterize Peckinpah's problematic relations with women and has constituted an important biographic background for parts of my misogyny section. Generally speaking, Evans also draws on his personal connection with Peckinpah and many of their common relationships to produce another semi-biographic report which feeds on the singularity of Peckinpah's personality but its impact on this thesis was of no great significance.

The following articles have helped in my understanding of Peckinpah's body of work. Together with the books selected they have contributed to a more solid grasp of Peckinpah's films and the realization of their polemical traits as well as their innovative appeal.

In "Major Dundee: review" (1965) Ernest Callenbach draws attention to *Major Dundee*'s flaws which can be identified not in the "logistical side" (40) of the film, which Peckinpah handled deftly, but rather through the inconsistency that the character played by Senta Berger represents in the narrative. The incoherence of finding a beautiful young widow, with a European background, in a rundown, dilapidated Mexican town seems to be no more than a contrived ploy to bring an element of romance into the story. Teresa, according to Callenbach, plays only a decorative role, "conjuring up booby-fantasies" with her "cocktail party-décolletage" (40) which threatens to undermine the credibility of the central story.

"In Defense of Sam Peckinpah" (1975) Mark Crispin Miller dwells mainly on *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* and Miller attempts to rehabilitate this much misunderstood and criticized film, by pointing out interesting aspects in its plot and character construction. Written at a time when Peckinpah was being harshly chastised for bringing meaningless violence to the screen, Miller offers an interesting analysis of its plot and characters, emphasizing the romantic side of the main characters' liaison, the hero's desperate quest

for vengeance and his final debacle. Although the article was written a long time ago, it remains an important dissenting view on a much maligned movie.

"*Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*" (1981) by Kathleen Murphy and Richard T. Jameson was written during Peckinpah's life-time and the article underlines some of the interesting aspects which Peckinpah's grimmest film encapsulates. The authors underline not only the surreal, bizarre visual aesthetic of the film - which they put down to production circumstances and the scarcity of means - but emphasise the characters' moral dilemma, the disturbing vision of a Mexico which is construed as a womb-tomb "where sex and death, fecundity and decomposition, are not discreet but simultaneous processes" (45) and the dark humor that underlies the narrative. Moreover, Murphy and Jameson explore one of the most unsavory scenes in the film, that of the attempted rape of Elita, played by Isela Vega. Their reading of the scene is at variance with my own exploration - but it is nevertheless interesting for all that - as it dodges the question of rape by turning it into "a question of love", as they see it: "a distillation of human relatedness, of corporeal and spiritual connection (46).

"Sam Peckinpah: Cutter" (1981) by Richard Gentner and Diane Birdsall explores Peckinpah's technical artistry by showcasing some of the idiosyncratic technical traits recurrently used by the director. Thus, Gentner and Birdsall not only emphasize the montage technique, with its impact on time and the way it is "radically compressed and lyrically contained"(35) but also give evidence of the way Peckinpah's dovetailing of scenes achieves a sense of visual intertwining often relying on metaphorical associations. They also emphasize how Jerry Fielding's musical score, present in many of Peckinpah's films, contributed to their dramatic impact as can be confirmed by the opening sequence of *The Wild Bunch*. Moreover, Peckinpah's credit sequences often stamped by his "directed by…" were never haphazardly made but always attempted to "build into and spring from the dramatic structure of the film" (35). This can also be perceived as evidence of his *auteur* status, a personal assertion of his signature and directorial imprint. This article condenses

some of his most important artistic characteristics and constitutes an interesting "catalogue" of his groundbreaking, carefully-hewn techniques.

"*The Ballad of Cable Hogue*" (1981) by Richard J. Jameson underscores how *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* is considered by many to be the gentlest of Peckinpah's film. Jameson emphasizes how the film is riven by contradictory forces between the earthly and the spiritual, the mundane and the "heavenly", whereby Peckinpah places his picaresque male character Hogue (played by Jason Robards) in situations which verge on the absurd - like finding water "where it wasn't" and thus saving himself from death and securing the means of his prosperity amidst the hostile desert. Jameson gives special attention to Stella Stevens's character Hildy, highlighting how her repartee with Hogue constitutes the "particular grace" of the film. Although the article adds nothing new to explorations which have been made in other sources - Paul Seydor's reading of the film is particularly insightful - it underscores the idea that Peckinpah could have thrived in a lighter, gentler mode had he not been so strongly drawn to the violence which *The Wild Bunch* initiated and which thereafter clung to his directorial persona.

"Sam Peckinpah: No Bleeding Heart" (1985) by Kathleen Murphy was written after Peckinpah's death in 1984 and it constitutes a tribute to the film director who she describes as "the American hunger artist" (74). By claiming that "Peckinpah's 14-film gallery is crowded with broken mirrors of himself", she argues that Cable Hogue was his "whole and holiest reflection" (74), the hero who survived against all odds, able to find water "where it wasn't" a metaphor for the painstaking creative act that movie-making entailed and for his eternal struggle against producers which in the film is transmuted into the alienating signs of progress. Murphy laments the fact that Peckinpah's death was given perfunctory treatment in the press and indicates his cinematic forebears: John Ford, Howard Hawks and John Huston who all exerted some influence on Peckinpah's portrayal of a "much fallen" (74), fragmented masculinity, his extolling of the outcast, his flirtation with male camaraderie as redemptive but also painfully imperiled by opposing forces. Like Seydor, she also positions him among literary figures - Melville, Hawthorne, Twain, Hemingway,

Faulkner - as they "all fished dark waters" (74) and were also enamored of a problematic masculine ideal which clashed with the ersatz drabness of the social world.

"Lost Weekend" (1984) by Richard T. Jameson was written when Peckinpah was shooting *The Osterman Weekend* and Jameson testified to Peckinpah's physical debilitation - at 56, he says "he looks ten years older than he did when we last saw him"(28) - and also to his more compliant manner regarding producers' impositions. Having been denied the chance to work with a cinematographer of his choice, Lou Lombardo in this case, and forbidden to rewrite Alan Sharp's script, Peckinpah acquiesced with these constraints, glad to be working again. The film, according to Jameson, is just a chance for Peckinpah to "ply his trade again" (28) and yet, despite its convoluted plot, based on Robert Ludlum's intrincate novel, the film's strength is predicated on John Hurt's Fassett and his "gaunted, private frenzy" (30) to use Jameson's words. In the film's indictment of modernity "wherein everything is screened and mediated" (30), Fassett epitomizes the blemished Peckinpah hero, bent on revenge but hankering after some ultimate form of existential redemption.

Besides being a tribute to *The Wild Bunch,* Michael Scragow's "The Homeric Power of Peckinpah's Violence" (1994) describes how Warner Brothers' intention to rerelease the film, as it had been originally prepared by Peckinpah (which received theatrical distribution in Europe but not in The United States), was derailed by the MPPA board's decision to attribute a NC-17 rating. This obviously led to the cancellation of the studio's plans and Scragow regrets the fact that contemporary "intelligent adolescents" (118) may be deprived of seeing a movie which "questions their responses to everything including its amazing surges of sanguinary imagery" (118).

"*Straw Dogs*: Women can only misbehave" (1995) by Linda Ruth Williams was particularly useful in my own analysis of *Straw Dogs*. Williams explores Susan George's Amy by bringing into focus the complexity of her character and what she signifies amidst a hostile, predatory male-oriented environment. She sheds light on David and Amy's unbalanced relationship, underlines David's progressive estrangement from his wife and posits Amy's sexually

taunting demeanor as the means through which she asserts her femininity in a universe where femininity "remains a problem, an irresolute form of unpredictability" (26). Williams also discloses the perverse nature of Amy's rape, a scene where Peckinpah equivocates on her response, suggesting, as Williams emphasizes, that there are "good" rapes and "bad" rapes and that Amy, in her volatile, unreliable nature was in fact "asking for it". This article is pivotal in my exploration of misogyny and the way *Straw Dogs* dramatizes Peckinpah's double-bind relationship with women.

At the time when distributors were preparing a cinematic re-release of *Straw Dogs*, Weddle wrote for *Sight and Sound* the article "*Straw Dogs*: They want to see brains flying out?" (1995) exploring the film's trajectory from its inception, when Peckinpah rewrote some of the basic events and characters by drawing upon the original novel by Gordon M. Williams *The Siege of Trencher's Farm*, and on David Goodman's already written script. The changes introduced were significant and were meant to focus upon the tension that grows between David and Amy, the couple around whom a maelstrom of violent events is set into motion. Weddle alludes to Peckinpah's disillusionment at being thought of as the director who might best represent the violent dynamic underlining the script. Had *Cable Hogue* been a hit, he wonders, Peckinpah might have been given another kind of material to handle and may have followed a different career path. Weddle also casts light on the film's narrative, bringing into focus the tension that grows deeper as David and Amy, from the outset perceived as deeply estranged, come up against the physical and psychological danger posed by the native hoodlums that lay siege to the house. Weddle also elaborates on Amy's rape scene, including Susan George's statements in interviews regarding her dread about shooting the scene and her conversations with Peckinpah to negotiate the degree of her exposure in it. Weddle's article is also useful inasmuch as it deals with the reactions the film set off in Britain and America. Whereas the British decried the film fiercely on the grounds of its excessive violence and skewed vision of the British countryside, in America reactions were polarized and included both rave reviews and scathing criticisms. This article also includes some interesting contrasts between Kubrick's violence in *A Clockwork Orange* (1969) and Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs*, attempting to explain why the latter was so much more

excoriated than the former. In fact, as Weddle suggests, Kubrick's "cool, ironic point of view" could not be more different than Peckinpah's frenzied editing style, drawing upon telephoto lenses to create the effect of rapid cutting and hallucinating close ups that "suck the audiences into his film's emotional turbulence" (25). As *Straw Dogs* will be object of detailed exploration in this work, I found this article compelling.

"Shall We Gather- Peckinpah's (partly) restored *Major Dundee* - and the quest that never ends" (2005) by Richard Combs goes into great detail on the different cuts that were imposed on Peckinpah's *Major Dundee* and the missing bits that might have given it the consistency it lacks. Despite the sloppy way the film was mutilated, Combs argues that it discloses Peckinpah's attention to detail and his handling of ambitious set-pieces, as can be seen in battle scenes. Combs also describes the long process (lasting over a decade) which led to the restoration of the film conducted by Grover Crisp from Sony Pictures Entertainment. This restoration added a 12-minute extension to the initial 136-minute release by Columbia and put back three missing scenes which "make the story slightly more cohesive and extend what was clearly meant to be a network of connections and comparisons between characters" (21).

In "Make War, Not Love: Sam Peckinpah's *Major Dundee* and *Cross of Iron*" (2012) Bernard F. Dukore expands on the parallels between the two war movies by Peckinpah released a dozen years apart, but presenting some interesting similarities: two soldiers who are severely wounded in combat are healed and brought back to "life" by a woman. As Dukore asks: "Might Peckinpah in the later film, consciously or not, have been trying to work out effectively what he had botched in the earlier one?" (50). The article also offers a thorough analysis of the butchering and maiming which *Major Dundee* underwent at the hands of Columbia producer Jerry Bresler in such a way that the important set-piece in Durango remains incoherent. Dukore emphasizes how these two films are mainly about men and their solipsistic quests and the female characters, both portrayed by the Austrian actress Senta Berger, are only relevant in that they help the heroes' convalescence and recovery. What both films demonstrate is that men feel really at home among other men. In

Peckinpah's world, as will be argued in this project, homosocial relations overshadow heterosexual ones. This has important implications for the misogyny section of this thesis.

In "Survivalist violence in American Cinema of the Early 1970s" (2013) Anthony Barker analyses survivalist violence in some films of the early seventies, including Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* and John Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972). Barker emphasizes how violence in 70s cinema is seen as a survivalist strategy for a masculinity under threat and brings to the fore the emotional and physical ugliness which had been hitherto sanitized by more sympathetic portrayals in earlier decades. He establishes interesting links between *Straw Dogs* and *The Night Of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968) inasmuch as David Sumner, the male hero played by Dustin Hoffman, also attempts to stave off, through violent means, the several attacks on his besieged home and in the end drives away with the idiot he has tried to protect from the local yokels' assault, both with the same zombie-like countenance.

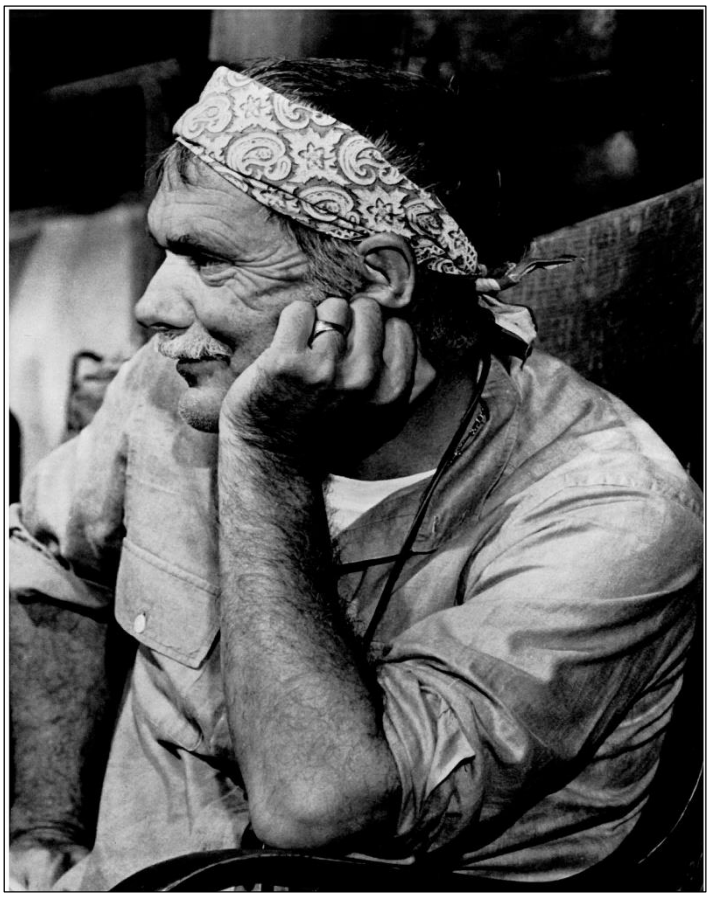
In total, these works have constituted the body of literature which has been influential in my understanding of the main issues in Peckinpah's work. The complete bibliography on which I have relied would include a much vaster range of works on the Western, on masculinity, melancholia and misogyny, and appears discussed in some detail in the relevant theoretical divisions of each of the next three parts. With this brief section I hope to have cast some light on the existing literature on Peckinpah and to have given an insight into the ideas and themes that his *oeuvre* has inspired. I also hope to have shown some of the areas where treatments have been less than complete, and where I have found fruitful scope for further discovery. I have also realized that most of the authors who have devoted their analyses to Peckinpah's work are male aficionados of the Western genre who endorse the director's extolling of a male ethos and tend to offer a glamorized view of his directorial persona. Bearing this in mind, I hope I have dodged such *peckinpahesque* sentimentalization.

Masculinity is an unavoidable topic here, however well-travelled, but both melancholy and misogyny have left considerable room for further exploration. I should add that although, as the above review shows, Peckinpah's life was uncommonly turbulent, he was in his

active prime during years when confusion and conflict were general in the American population. It would be a mistake to see the issues raised by his films as being little more than a personal psychodrama; the films should be seen as trying to articulate and hang on to something of value for more than just Bloody Sam.

Part II

Masculinity in the Films of Sam Peckinpah



3. “I find colour and vitality and meaning in the loser”, Sam Peckinpah in an interview with Lee Jenson, 1970 (Hayes: 76).

I- Masculinity in Hollywood Cinema: of power and the body

"I'm told you're a man of true grit."
Mattie Ross (Kim Darby) to Rooster Cogburn (John Wayne) in Henry Hathaway's *True Grit* (1969)

In this section masculinity in Hollywood cinema will be addressed insofar as it becomes relevant to explore Peckinpah's vision of manhood. In this regard, American cinema has always been enamored with the idea of "true grit" as a constitutive feature of male images. That John Wayne as the eye-patched, drunken, pot-bellied Cogburn still projects power and moral fortitude in Hathaway's film is evidence that the construction of male subjectivity - white and heterosexual - has always rested upon a projection of rugged individualism and self-sufficiency. In the last scene of the film, despite being "old and fat", he can still do some horse jumping to prove Mattie's taunting comments on his age wrong. Not surprisingly, the Coen brothers' remake (2010) reinforces the idea of the obsolescence of the character through Mattie's later realization that he has disappeared from the social landscape. It also underlines her un-marriageability since her strong-willed nature and financial skills would make her unsuitable for a subservient role in any heterosexual relation. This resolution is not envisioned in Hathaway's film - feminist analyses had not insisted on Mattie's subversive nature yet, preferring vulnerability - where at the end Mattie still includes marriage in her future plans. No wonder Cogburn remarks, as she stubbornly tags along with him: "She reminds me of me". He ends up working for a Wild West Show, the ultimate commodification of the frontier myths which, in another way, underscores his anachronistic existence. Garry Wills observes about the male image Wayne incarnated:

> It may seem surprising that, at a time when gender studies dominate much of film criticism, when essay after essay is devoted to masculinity on the screen so little attention is paid to Wayne. Much of the new literature answers critic Laura Mulvey's famous claim that a male gaze makes women the sole sex objects of the cinema. In the response to her, we are given counterexamples of men who have been the object of sexual "voyeurism". Wayne, wrapped against a hostile environment, does not qualify for the kind of gaze directed at the exposed bodies of men in bible epics, boxing films or sci-fi fantasies (1997: 22).

In Wills's view Wayne's "slumberous power" (21) did not arouse much interest in critical studies because:

> Gender criticism that defines "masculinity" has been mostly concerned with figures like James Dean, Montgomery Clift, or Marlon Brando. Maleness is acutely experienced at points where it is doubted or questioned. Wayne seems too obtuse to question his own macho swagger, which means that he can be dismissed without analysis. It is telling that Ford did not think of Wayne when casting "sensitive" roles but chose Henry Fonda or James Stewart - and they have been the object of masculine studies (23).

And yet Wayne's persona, despite its seemingly unproblematic nature, is beset by the same contradictions and strains that have entangled and complicated the way masculinity has been represented onscreen. He created a larger than life, monumental image of masculinity but one which was not devoid of contradictions as seen so disturbingly in Hawks's *Red River* (1948) or Ford's *The Searchers* (1956). But, as Wills also remarks "The strength of Wayne was that he embodied our deepest myth - that of the frontier. His weakness is that it was only a myth" (26). Significantly, many of the critical analyses surrounding Wayne's persona are structured around his "massive frame and fluid movement" (Meeuf 2009: 92) which reify the importance of the body and the different meanings it projects in the construction of masculinity. Russell Meeuf highlights how Wayne's body and his distinctive endorsement of an inviolable masculinity ran counter to the post-war emphasis on the family - and its supportive role for the traumatized war veterans - as it often projects unsavory traits. He argues:

> But this masculinity ideal is not explicitly celebrated either in the films or the discourses surrounding Wayne in the 1950s. Instead, we see a homoerotic desire for Wayne's masculinity and Wayne's body while at the same time this vision of masculinity is portrayed as cynical, tyrannical and incompatible with the growing hegemony of the white, middle-class, nuclear family. It is simultaneously desire for and rejection of Wayne's body and all that it signifies that accounts for his significance in the late 1940s and 1950s (2009: 92).

4. Wayne as the tyrannical Tom Dunson being defied by a gentler embodiment of manhood represented by Montgomery Cliff as Matt Garth in Hawks's *Red River.*

Despite this, Ford's most problematic heroes such as Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* or Guthrie McCabe (James Stewart) in *Two Rode Together* (1961), who display a cynical and bitter vision of the world, are ultimately rescued from their existential nihilism. Ethan being able to rescue his niece and bring her back home and McCabe forsaking his materialistic cynicism and embracing a future with a woman who is regarded as tainted by her sexual contact with an Indian. Jean-Luc Godard, quoted by Kitses, stated apropos of one of the most striking scenes in Ford's most contentious film: "How can I hate John Wayne upholding Goldwater and yet love him tenderly when abruptly he takes Natalie Wood in his arms in the last reel of *The Searchers*?" (2004: 100). By equating Ethan's rugged

individualism with paranoid racial hatred and anti-community values, Ford eventually circumvents the psychological fissures in the character and attempts to redeem what is uniquely unassailable in Wayne's persona, his masculine, narcissistic image. In this sense, Robert B. Pippin argues that Ethan's unhinged hatred and his thirst for revenge bespeak the frail community ties which the narrative had already posited as an elusive façade. Pippin states:

> It is after all Ethan that stays in the light and the community that retreats to darkness, a completing and somewhat unnerving darkness when the door shuts. I do not mean either that Ethan is simply right about the fragility of conventional or constructed rather than "natural" political identity or that he has achieved genuine self-knowledge. He is still blind in many ways and so still must wander off, as he does in the last shot we have of him, as if broken and burdened by what he has been through. But much of what he actually believes and is willing to do has been illuminated in the public world of darkness, has been exposed as it were, and that is not true of the darkness inside (the community's self-understanding has not been tested like Ethan's and he sometimes seems to be trying to help them prevent such a testing) (2009: 244).

Wayne's influence on other male stars such as Clint Eastwood can be confirmed by the way both elicit from the spectator the pleasure of looking, their arresting screen personae suggest an overpowering narcissism which dismisses the need for language. As Peter Lehman remarks: "Powerful men often hold language in reserve, not because they are excluded from it but because they do not need it" (1993: 59). Lehman also underlines how stature and muscularity is central to the construction of masculinity that American cinema has privileged. Exploring *Scarlet Street* (Fritz Lang, 1945), Lehman emphasizes how Edward G. Robinson's Chris, in his diminished size, articulates an emasculated representation of masculinity which bespeaks "a dominant cultural assumption of a relationship between masculinity and the body" (89). In this sense, Lehman states:

> To be a real man is to look like one, to be tall, strong, powerful. Moreover, this notion of masculinity is obviously quantifiable: one can be more or less of a man, and Chris is clearly less. He neither acts nor looks like a "real" man (89).

Not surprisingly, stars like Dustin Hoffman or Al Pacino, who fall foul of the tall model, have made of their Method-type performance skills the main appeal of their screen personae.

Their diminished size could have positioned them in a culturally encoded projection of inadequacy had that not been compensated for by their highly crafted acting styles.

The idea of male bonding and professionalism is also deeply entwined with action-fuelled narratives which legitimize male strength in the face of multiple dangers. This is particularly relevant in male-oriented genres that emphasize American exceptionalism through the figure of lone heroes who often fight against arch villains and come up against a bureaucracy-ridden system. Male bonding acquires a special significance in narratives where masculinity is endangered by women and by the entanglements of romance. *Rio Bravo* (Howard Hawks, 1959) brings to the fore the idea that male connection is purging and an avenue to the regaining of self-respect. This is played out by pitting Wayne's stalwart John T. Chance against Dean Martin's troubled Dude, an ex-deputy who has lost dignity and respect through his reckless drinking. The film thus traces how John T. rescues Dude from degradation and restores, through trust and professional gumption, his old self. Tellingly, he had kept Dude's pistols and attire stashed away in a drawer waiting for the moment when Dude is again in control of his marksmanship, a process which takes time and reveals itself as painful. Women are a disturbing presence in the narrative: Angie Dickinson's Feathers challenges Wayne's authority and often catches him off-guard as when she mocks him as Carlos, the Mexican saloon keeper - stereotypically small, talkative and dominated by his wife - holds up a pair of red women's underwear against Chance's waist and imagines what they will look like on his wife Consuelo. Not surprisingly, Dude's alcoholism and loss of self-respect were caused by his having fallen in love with the "wrong" woman, who cheated on him and eventually left town. Hawks's world is ultimately about masculine power, a contest of wills and the cleansing effect of male bonding against threats caused by femininity, outlawry and a powerless or ineffectual societal organization. As Peter Lehman remarks:

> *Rio Bravo* can be seen as a drama about masculinity with its four major male characters representing different levels of masculinity. John T. Chance is the ideal figure of strength and power, which is further underscored by casting John Wayne in the part. In the 1950s Wayne was at the height of his career, his name and image virtually synonymous with the quintessential Western hero. In contrast, Dude was once a figure of ideal masculinity, but drinking has destroyed this. At the beginning of the film, he is groveling, ill shaven, poorly dressed, and overtly nervous. His drive

> to regain his masculinity is treated very seriously in the film: indeed, it becomes a minidrama of masculinity lost and regained (1993: 57).

In that sense, Hawks's films and their emphasis on male ties have had a particular impact on Sam Peckinpah's foregrounding of the all-male bunch, but whereas for Hawks this bonding is restorative and healing, for Peckinpah it assumes a troubled dimension, as it is constantly threatened by betrayal. And yet, despite this, both directors underline the importance of professionalism even when enacted on the margins of the law (as in Peckinpah's case and more particularly in *The Wild Bunch* and *The Getaway*) is the mark of masculine power and appears bound up with the pleasure at looking at the male acting with proficiency and decisiveness. Lehman's words are again apposite:

> As Wood and others have noted the proof of masculinity in Hawks's films is based on how "good" a man is at what he does, and the characters in *Rio Bravo* talk a great deal about how "good" someone is. Masculinity becomes a virtual division between professionals and amateurs (1993: 57).

It becomes relevant that in her critical analysis of John Woo's films (whose work is indebted to Peckinpah), Jillian Sandell highlights how his films posit male bonding as structuring a concept of masculinity which operates in the domestic and social realms and "recuperates strength and honor without sacrificing emotional intimacy" (1996: 26). She argues that this emotional depth becomes empowering rather than disempowering and, even acknowledging the specter of misogyny, as women are peripheral and merely decorative, Sandell argues that male ties become the condition to reconfigure masculinity in a less monolithic mold. Not surprisingly, her description of Woo's representations of masculinity seem to echo many aspects of Peckinpah's homosocial environments:

> Woo's films, by contrast, suggest a cultural fantasy about gender and sexuality in which intimacy is valorized and celebrated as an important aspect to all relationships - both sexual and platonic. His films contain a vision of masculinity that allows men to be simultaneously tough action heroes as well as what is often called "emotionally present". This combination of emotional and physical presence provides an interesting challenge to stereotypical notions of what it means to be a male action hero (24).

5. John Wayne as John T. Chance teaming up with the young Colorado in a display of marksmanship: male bonding across generations.

Peckinpah's musings over the travails of male friendship accord with Sandell's portrayal of the spectacle of male intimacy in as contemporary a director as Woo, and yet the former's work, contradicting Sandell's arguments, explores how this intimacy can be the very source of disempowerment insofar as it hints at a melancholy recognition of its impossibility in a world defined by corruptive forces.

Thus, masculinity can be argued to be at the core of American film narratives, as they centrally dramatize and articulate a whole range of images which legitimize what being a man signifies. Studies on masculinity were at their inception informed by social sciences

and by a sex role theory which ascribed a set of internalized traits to gender differences. The theory implies a biological determinism which assumes that sexual differences entail a conformity to socially inscribed models. As R. W. Connell states about this theoretical framework:

> It provided a handy way of linking the idea of a place in social structure with the idea of cultural norms. Through the galaxy of anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists the concept, by the end of the 1950, had joined the stock of conventional terms in social science (1995: 22).

And yet, the sex-role theory failed to give a substantial account of masculinity as embedded in a context of daily power dynamics, since it fell short of disclosing how relationships of power operate in men and women's real social and cultural interactions. In this line of thought, Tim Carrigan *et al* observe:

> Broadly, the "role" framework has been used to analyze what the difference is between the social positions of women and men, to explain how they are shaped for those positions, and to describe the changes and conflicts that have occurred in and about those positions. At the simplest level, it is clear that the sex-role framework accepts that sexual differentiation is a social phenomenon: sex roles are learnt, acquired or "internalized". But the precise meaning of the social relations proposed by the framework is not nearly as simple as its proponents assume. The very idea of "role" implies a recognizable and accepted standard, and sex role theorists posit just such a norm to explain sexual differentiation. Society is organized around a pervasive differentiation between men and women's roles, and these roles are internalized by all individuals. There is an obvious common sense appeal to this approach. But the first objection to be made is that it does not really describe the concrete reality of people's lives. Not all men are "responsible" fathers nor "successful" in their occupation, and so on. Most men's lives reveal some departure from what "the male sex-role" is supposed to prescribe (1987: 165).

With the Women's Liberation Movements in the seventies, masculinity became an object of critical scrutiny. Gay-liberation and leftist movements also prepared the ground for a consciousness-raising drive challenging the imposition of a hegemonic masculinity which stifled other forms of "subordinated masculinities" (1987: 179). Moreover, Connell also emphasizes how feminism stimulated discussion about masculinity and gave rise to a movement of men's liberation akin to women's mobilization:

> The ferment among the women in the Western intelligentsia gradually had an impact on the men. By the mid-1970s there was a small but much-discussed Men's Liberation movement in the United States and a small network of men's consciousness-raising groups in other countries as well. Authors such as Warren Farrell in *The Liberated Man*, and Jack Nichols in *Men's Liberation*, argued that the male role was oppressive and ought to be changed or abandoned. A minor boom developed in a new genre of Books About Men, and in papers in counselling and social science journals. Their flavor is given by two titles: "The inexpressive male: a tragedy of American society" and "Warning: the male sex-role may be dangerous to your health". The idea of "men's studies", to go with the feminist project of women's studies, was floated (24).

Robert A. Nye observes about critical studies on masculinity: "The field originally profited from a conjunction of feminist theory and women's studies, but, as the harvest of books under review reveals, a current boom area is masculinity studies" (2005: 1938). He also states:

> Men are no longer the invisible, unmarked gender, the Archimedean point from which all norms, laws and rights flow; men are themselves the objects of the gaze of women and other men, and of a new critical scholarship that is deeply informed by the feminist insights of Eve Kosofsky Sedwick, Judith Butler, and Joan W. Scott, among many others, and by the scholarship of pioneers in the study of masculinity, including Lynne Segal, Michael S. Kimmel and R. W. Connell (1938).

Nye also emphasizes concerns centering around questions of racial, sexual and class-based relationships among men which have shifted from oppression, as part of a feminist agenda, to concentrate on broader issues of power and its concomitant imbalances. He argues in this regard:

> Though the metacritical perspectives on the origins and nature of male oppression that initially preoccupied second wave feminists are still very much at play, recent gender studies emphasizes the adaptive nature of masculine identities. It is the protean quality of masculinity that has stimulated the notion that historically hegemonic forms of masculinity have undergone crises requiring restabilization and, more recently, supported the idea that masculinity is in perpetual crisis, permanently engaged in patching up traditional ideals, inventing new ones, and reconsolidating masculine advantage. Methodologically, economic and political analysis has been replaced by discourse and cultural analysis, the evolution of institutional structures by the reconsideration of language (1939).

Accordingly, it becomes relevant to discuss the concept of hegemony when gender constructions come to the fore. As Carrigan *et al* remark: "The overall relations between men and women, further, are not a confrontation between homogeneous, undifferentiated blocs". The need to accommodate difference, the "fissuring of the categories of "men" and "women" (178) should be recognized as a departure from a conceptual groundwork where hegemonic masculinity is played out in many different forms of persuasion such as the media and, more particularly, advertising. Carrigan *et al* state in this sense:

> "Hegemony", then, always refers to a historical situation, a set of circumstances in which power is won and held. The construction of hegemony is not a matter of pushing and pulling between ready-formed groups, but it is a matter of the formation of those groupings. To understand the different kinds of masculinity demands, above all, an examination of practices in which hegemony is constituted and contested - in short the political techniques of the patriarchal social order (181).

Connell also argues that hegemony implies the relational dynamics between different forms of masculinity. In itself hegemony is not a static concept but one which entails relationships of complicity with patriarchal authority, marginalization and subordination of deviant groups. It is a collective practice which presupposes collusion with forms of institutionalized power that reinforce particular images of masculinity. He observes:

> We must also recognize the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that construct and include, that intimidate, exploit and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity (37).

He also maintains:

> At any given time one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (…). I stress that hegemonic masculinity embodies a "currently accepted" strategy. When conditions for the defense of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded, new groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony. The dominance

> of any group of men may be challenged by women - hegemony, then, is a historically mobile relation (77).

Joseph M. Armengol argues that criticism in gender studies has focused more on women, as they have had the need to adopt a more assertive role within patriarchal structures which have traditionally rendered them peripheral and sometimes invisible, and yet the need to question masculinity and its social constructions contributes to exposing the way "our understanding of men and masculinities has also been diminished by universalizing notions of manhood" (Armengol 2007: 76). Armengol's arguments are then apposite inasmuch as he highlights how masculinity has been construed as a universalizing given which neglects the idea that "men are also gendered and in this gendered process, the transformation of biological males into socially interacting men is a central experience for men", adding: "because masculinity tries to retain its hegemony by passing itself off as normal and universal, rendering masculinity visible becomes essential for its analysis and critique"(76). Reflecting on masculinity certainly renders visible the fissures in the veneer of socially constructed male assurance and Peckinpah's *oeuvre* with its insistent articulation of images of masculinity embedded in the Western, but bereft of invincibility or a Shane-like chivalry, contribute to the disruption of the patriarchal discourses on which those images were predicated.

When we consider American cinema and its reliance on a model of masculinity which is one of virile power and moral unassailability, we should bear in mind the myriad of "subordinated masculinities" which are veiled by this model but which come to the surface at unexpected moments, in the effort to hold on to an image which is constantly problematized by its idealized projection. Thus, the relationship between masculinity and the body is pivotal in this work, as representations of the male body and the way it appears so strongly coded, as underlined by Lehman, become the ideal ground to explore departures from hegemony and to expose the yawning gap between masculinity, in its actual contextualized dimension, and masculinity as a symbolic representation of power. Connell emphasizes the centrality of the body and the sense of its materiality when questions of gender are brought to the fore. He claims that, despite the productive work

on the semiotics of gender, the body in its corporeality has sometimes been forgotten or only seen as a kind of "surface to be imprinted, a landscape to be marked out" (50). He argues:

> A rethinking may start by acknowledging that in our culture, at least, the physical sense of maleness and femaleness is central to the cultural interpretation of gender. Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex (52-53).

And adds:

> Bodies cannot be understood as a neutral medium of social practice. Their materiality matters. They will do certain things and not others. Bodies are substantively in play in social practices such as sport, labour and sex. Some bodies are more than recalcitrant, they disrupt and subvert the social arrangements into which they are invited (58).

By putting forward the notion of "body-reflexive practice" (61), Connell stresses the idea that bodies are both objects and agents of practice within social contexts where they are defined and appropriated but where they might also be disruptive of hegemony. As he suggestively observes, "Bodies, it seems, are not only subversives. They can be jokers too" (59). This concept seems to acquire a special relevance when we consider how many of Peckinpah's male protagonists are oftentimes tricked by their flawed physicality, their bodies acting as "jokers" upon their willingness to perform. Calvin Thomas has also analyzed how the male body has been rendered invisible in representational discourses insofar as visibility would entail a disruption of the boundaries in which it appears contained and which secures its hegemony. By contrast, visibility is displaced onto the female which is always embodied, clad by its corporeal nature and therefore closer to what Kristeva posits as the abject, "which disturbs identity, system, order" and does not "respect border, positions, rules" (1982: 4). Thomas raises Kristeva's notion of the abject to disturb masculinity in its dominant, unassailable position, emphasizing that anxiety over the male body and its processes of representation can imply a productive - albeit destabilizing - social and political re-inscription of manhood. Then this may constitute an alternative to the postulates of phallogocentrism which tend to foreclose on masculine subjectivity - with its

attendant forms of figuring and imaging itself. This would entail a loosening of boundaries, a blurring of pre-determined frontiers that might be anxiety-inducing but also generating of change. As Thomas claims: "Masculinity does not exist outside representation, yet in the processes of self-representation it risks losing itself, changing itself, seeping through its own fissures and cracks" (1996: 16). He elaborates further on this idea:

> What needs to be examined, however, is how the imperative act of excluding abject things functions in the construction of masculinized identity and the linguistic and representational processes by which the masculinized subject attempts to identify (with) itself. For this exclusion of the abject does more than suppress the threat of the maternal - or the feminine. An abject masculine relationship to the maternal, to the feminine, to the non-identical, also interprets - and is perhaps over-determined by an anxious masculine relationship to the male body, *to the visibility of that body, the traverse of its boundaries, the representability of its products, the corporeal conditions of male subjectivity, and the unavoidable materiality of the signifying process*. This anxiety is an inevitable function of an idealized identificatory system, the long-standing patriarchal ideology in which embodiment and femininity are equated, in which male bodies do not matter, in which only women are supposed to have bodies, in which only women's bodies are seen (15). (my italics)

Thomas's words acquire a special resonance for Peckinpah's male images inasmuch as masculinity is rendered visible through the foregrounding of the male body in its most disempowered state, often entailing its losing of boundaries through bloodshed and death. This anxiety may induce a form of aggression since "male productive anxiety constitutes a psycho-symbolic area that can be both used as a site of resistance to patriarchy and exploited for the purposes of furthering male domination" (17). This implies a predicament for Peckinpah's heroes whose relation with the body often devolves into a hysterical denial of its corporeal abjection: still attempting to cling on to male domination, they are ultimately frustrated by their fallibility.

Significantly, Susan Jeffords underlines the changes from a hard-boiled masculinity, which characterized the cinema of the 80s, into a more caring and sensitive image of manhood in the 90s through a different portrayal of the male body. The "big switch" which masculinity undergoes is operated by a new representation of the male body which is no longer seen as a "lethal weapon" venting its frustration and fury in hostile environments but as a body

"capable of change" (1993: 196), reconnecting with hitherto untapped emotions. That this body is still white and heterosexual projects the need to reconfigure masculinity within the parameters of mainstream, "sanitized" bodies, which staves off the intrusions of peripheral racial constructions. Jeffords observes about this transition:

> And though nineties films repudiate many of the characteristics of that body - its violence, its isolation, its lack of emotion, and its presence - it does not challenge the whiteness of that body, nor the "special" figuration that body demands. If, these films suggest, there is a body that has been betrayed, victimized, burdened by the society that surrounds it, it is not the body of color, the body that has been historically marked by the continuous betrayals of a social, political and cultural system that has marginalized and abused it. It is, instead, the body of the white man who is suffering because he has been unloved (205-206).

By rendering visible the contradictions, tensions and anxieties which cinematic constructions of manhood have also projected, feminist-oriented discourses helped disclose the fragilities that lie beneath the surface of these fixed gender conceptions. Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim argue that there is a gulf between the symbolic structures of power and the actual experience of this power inasmuch as having a penis is not the same as holding the phallus (and controlling the power apparatuses the latter entails). They state:

> In films power, patriarchy and privilege in the public world often stand for aspects of the inner, psychic world, but they also carry more direct meanings and reverberations. Power is central to the public, political sphere, to patriarchy and hence to any consideration of masculinity; indeed power and masculinity are virtually synonymous. (1995: 18)

They also underscore that "One source of male tragedy, then, is the inevitable trajectory of phallic power, another is its inaccessibility" (17). In that sense, Kirkham and Thumim's views are significant in the world that Peckinpah recreates and in the inner contradictions that the Western, as a male-oriented genre, has always encompassed. The gulf between the symbolic and the difficulties in acceding to it are relevant in the issues discussed here. Kirkham and Thumim observe in this regard:

> In a sense we might propose that the whole institution of cinema is in itself a dangerous enterprise for the masculine subject because in constructing convincing and meaning*ful* [sic] representations of masculinity in its fictional characters, it focuses attention on the social construction of masculinity, on its trajectory from the rising to the tragic - from the quiescent, to the statuesque to the depleted (14).

This also brings to mind Judith Butler's elaboration on gender as performativity and the attendant conception that gender is socially constructed and embedded in cultural structures, congealed in discursive practices which purport to reify their "univocal posturing" (1990: 32), passing off as naturalized configurations. Butler's words are worth citing when she observes:

> Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender (33).

Similarly, Teresa de Lauretis had also observed before Butler's theorization:

> The cultural conceptions of male and female as two complementary yet mutually exclusive categories into which all human beings are placed constitute within each culture a gender system, a symbolic system or system of meanings (…). The sex system, in short, is both a social cultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc) to individuals within the society (1987: 5).

Feminist film theorization sheds light on the way women and their onscreen counterparts were subject to objectification and displayed for erotic allure, belittled in their narrative function and pared down to a merely decorative function, subsumed under the tyranny of the male gaze. In this context, Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), drew the opposition between an active masculinity, bearer of the look, and a passive femininity which is always the object of scopophilia, becoming thus an object of erotic desire. Her main argument emphasizes how women have been

objectified in cinematic representations, laying bare the imbalance which presides over gender relations through the scopic regime operated by the cinematic apparatus. As she argues:

> The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness* (1992: 750).

She remarks however that women's sexual otherness poses in psychoanalytic terms the threat of castration, or castration anxiety, which the look seeks constantly to circumvent through strategies of disavowal. This is achieved through two different paths that coalesce into the same result: voyeurism and fetishism. Whereas the former attempts to investigate the woman, ascertain guilt and thus effect some sort of punishment - she gives the example of Hitchcock's *oeuvre* - the latter tends to dwell on particular features of the female body which is eroticized - through fragmented close-ups - to the extent that it tends to freeze narrative by focusing on the "look alone" (754). As the most striking representative of fetishistic scopophilia, Mulvey invokes Sternberg's work with Marlene Dietrich, underlining the way Dietrich's onscreen image seems to take up the screen in its erotic enticement, unmediated by the look of the male protagonist and "in direct rapport with the spectator" (754). Her views have given rise to a great deal of debate inasmuch as by positing the male gaze as the structuring scopic cinematic regime, she dismisses the possibility of a female gaze taking up an active role. Thus, her afterthoughts to her first essay are centered on *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946), a Western which colludes with melodrama and its emphasis on female desire. Mulvey here makes some attempts to re-consider her earlier work by acknowledging the possibility of a female active gaze. Drawing on Freudian theorization, she argues that in the early stages of childhood, there is a pre-Oedipal gender blurring whereby the boundaries between masculine and feminine are not clearly demarcated. By regressing to an action-driven, masculine-oriented stage it is possible for women to take on an active gaze. This is achieved through trans-sexual identification, whereby women are capable of assuming a "masculine point of view". In fact, Mulvey

observes: “trans-sex identification is a habit that very easily becomes second nature” (1999: 125). She also argues:

> The correct road, femininity, leads to increasing repressing of the “active” (the “phallic phase” in Freudian terms). In this sense Hollywood genre films structured around masculine pleasure, offering an identification with the active point of view, allow a woman spectator to rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity, the never fully repressed bed-rock of feminine neurosis (124).

Mary Ann Doane’s elaboration on female spectatorship springs to mind here since it chimes in with Mulvey’s theorization, foregrounding masquerade as the possibility for women to evade the male-structured regime of spectactorial look. Masquerade operates as a strategy to circumvent the opposition between proximity and distance that the cinematic apparatus implies - according to Metz, a presence that is always already an absence - since women’s image is always “an over presence of the image- she *is* the image” (1992: 762). To use Metz’s theoretical framework, the scopic regime of cinema is predicated on voyeurism, on “unauthorized scopophilia” of an illusion of presence of the object seen and apprehended by an all-perceiving subject (1992: 744) and yet, for the female spectator, Doane argues that the distance that all voyeurs require from the object is problematized since her image is too close, denying “the very distance or gap specified by Metz” (261) and considered essential in the relationship between the subject and the act of looking. As Doane observes: “The body so close, so excessive, prevents the woman from assuming a position similar to the man’s in relation to the signifying systems (232). Masquerade allows the distance which is precluded by the excess of closeness between female spectators and their female cinematic counterparts. Then, “the masquerade doubles representation; it is constituted by a hyperbolisation of the accoutrements of femininity” (766). Doane affirms:

> The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask that can be worn or removed. The masquerade’s resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as precisely imagistic (235).

These thoughts are significant since they prepare the ground for exploring masculinity in its “performativity” dimension, whereby the strategy of masquerade appears bound up

with hyperbolic traits which hint at the need to reinforce an imperiled phallic authority through the flaunting of masculine "accoutrements", to use Doane's expression. In this line of thought, Chris Holmlund, for instance, attempts to prove how masquerade operates for "both sexes in order to break down rigid gender-bound dichotomies" (1993: 214) which oftentimes play upon parody as a strategy to disclose masculinity as artifice and "subversive spectacle" (215).

Despite the far-reaching impact of Mulvey's argumentation, it failed to recognize how men can also elicit the pleasure of looking, a fact which is supported by the whole star-system apparatus. Critical studies which have centered on masculinity have emphasized how the male body can also become an erotic object, eliciting a scopophiliac sense of gratification. Peter Lehman for instance considers that Mulvey's views dismiss the idea that looking does not necessarily entail objectification which would *per se* fail to explain "the complex issues of pleasure in cinema" (21). He adds:

> Even if women are successfully enculturated to blind themselves to the male body - and I do not think they are - such cultural conventions cannot be applied to the cinema for the simple reason that all men and women are in some way objectified in the cinema. All of us, men and women, lesbians, gays, and heterosexuals, must look at the bodies of these represented men, even if only that we may identify with the male characters. In other words, even if a case can be made culturally and psychoanalytically that women do not derive pleasure visually from objectifying male bodies, such a paradigm cannot be transferred to cinema because while watching a movie everyone is looking at representations of bodies in ways that include, but are not limited, to objectification. The cultural phenomenon surrounding the star system, for example, clearly indicates this (1993: 21).

Likewise, taking his cue from Mulvey's argumentation, Steve Neale elaborates on the possibility that masculinity can be presented in terms of spectacle, positing a narcissistic identification between the male protagonists and the male viewer. The male image becomes thus an erotic object of contemplation since it capitalizes on an idea of omnipotence and self-control. In this sense Neale, reinforcing Mulvey's views but exploring other possibilities, argues that Westerns, more than any other genre, draw upon the contrast between narcissistic authority and social law, between integration into the

symbolic or regression into a fantasy of narcissistic phallic power which is played out by the escape from marriage and social assimilation. This recurrent image of narcissistic power which is so strongly at play in Westerns becomes a source of pleasure since it enacts an image of masculinity which is free from social obligations and emotional ties. While this may imply exclusion from the social order - as happens with all of Peckinpah's outsiders - it is perceived as desirable, evoking a fantasy-fuelled notion of untrammeled manhood. Neale does not dismiss the idea that narcissistic identification can entail a masochist position for the male spectator, since that omnipotent figure is always already an idealized figure, an ideal ego which is so out of reach. Metz's argument that the viewer's relation with the screen is one of knowledge and intelligibility - which is contrary to the Lacanian's mirror stage through which the child misconstrues his/her own mirror image as more perfect and is still incapable of seeing him/herself as an independent subject - bears out the idea that the spectator is already on the side of the symbolic, being aware that what he/she perceives is an object and that he/she is already a subject (who can be also an object for others). As Metz states: "The practice of cinema presupposes that the primitive un-differentiation of the ego and the non-ego has been overcome (1992: 733). This seems relevant to explain why Neale postulates the construction of an ego ideal through cinematic representations as a potential source of anxiety. He observes:

> While the ego ideal may be a "model" with which the male subject identifies and to which it aspires, it may also be a source of further images and feelings of castration, inasmuch as that ideal is something to which the subject is never adequate (1993: 13).

Moreover, recalling Mulvey's description of the voyeuristic look, Neale remarks that this same voyeuristic gaze can be "applied to male genres, to films concerned largely or solely with the depiction of relations between a hero and a male villain" (16). He states:

> War films, Westerns, and gangster movies, for instance, are all marked by "action", by "making something happen". Battles, fights and duels of all kinds are concerned with struggles of "will and strength", "victory and defeat", between individual men and/or groups of men. All of which implies that male figures on the screen are subject to voyeuristic looking, both on the part of the spectator and on the part of other male characters (16).

He also remarks that voyeurism oftentimes entails fetishism, especially in Leone's Westerns which tend to dwell on close-ups and protract the climactic moment of gun-battles, reveling in the visual spectacle as the *raison d'être* of the narrative itself. Despite this, the erotic display is disavowed by displacing onto the intra-diegetic world where the characters inhabit an exchange of looks which is always one of fear, menace or aggression and not one of erotic approbation.

Richard Dyer's essay on the male pin-up and the representations of the male body is valuable in this context inasmuch as Dyer explains that the anxiety of looking at the male image in its physical, spectacular aspect is always deflected by putting the emphasis on an idea of activity rather than on a passive stance which connotes looked-at-ness. This is mainly structured around the look and what the look signifies. As Dyer states:

> A certain instability is produced - the first of several we encounter when looking at images of men that are offered as sexual spectacle. On the one hand, this is a visual medium, these men are there to be looked at by women. On the other hand, this does violence to the codes of who looks and who is looked at (and how), and some attempt is instinctively made to counteract this violation (1992: 267).

He explains:

> To repeat, it is not a question of whether or not the model looks at his spectator(s), but how he does or does not. In the case of not looking, where the female model typically averts her eyes, expressing modesty, patience and a lack of interest in anything else, the male model looks either off or up. In case of the former, his look suggests an interest in something else that the viewer cannot see - it certainly doesn't suggest any interest in the viewer. Indeed it barely acknowledges the viewer, whereas the woman's averted eyes do just that - they are averted from the viewer. In the cases where the model is looking up, this always suggests a spirituality: he might be there for his face and body to be gazed at, but his mind is on higher things, and it is this upward striving that is most supposed to please (267).

Relevant to these arguments, Paul Smith, in his analysis of Clint Eastwood's persona, argues that in action films and more particularly in the Western, there is an ever-recurrent reliance upon pleasure, masochism and transcendence. Smith elaborates on Paul Willemen's seminal essay on the eroticization of the male body in Anthony Mann's Westerns wherein the spectator revels in looking at the male in context. Willemen says:

> The viewer's experience is predicated on the pleasure of seeing the male "exist" (that is, walk, ride, flight) in or through cityscapes, landscapes or, more abstractly, history. And on the unquiet pleasure of seeing the male mutilated (often quite graphically in Mann) and restored through violent brutality. This fundamentally homosexual voyeurism (almost always repressed) is not without its problems: the look at the male produces just as much anxiety as the look at the female, especially when it is presented as directly as in the killing scenes in *T-Men* and *Border Incident*. The anxiety is marked in the images themselves: the shadowy world of the film noir, where Mann often relies exclusively on lateral, fragmented lighting and bizarre camera angles; then the contorted "neurotic" landscapes, shacks or ghost towns of the Western; in their turn replaced by the stylized opulence and giganticism of the imagery of the epics. The images always draw attention to themselves, never as fodder for the eye, but always eye-catching, arresting the look. Spectacular in the true sense of the word (1998: 211).

Smith's view accords with Willemen's, underscoring that this pleasure in looking is linked with the male body by means of the visual pleasure it incites. The idea of a virile body entails a process of narcissistic identification with an ego ideal but masochism, by way of contrast, begins to surface as this body is often victimized through physical punishment, which disavows the homoeroticism implicit in the display of the male body in its spectacular dimension. But Smith adds an important final step in this psychic dynamic predicated on scopophilia. He states:

> This pleasure can readily be turned to an eroticization of the male presence and the masculine body, and it is always followed up - in Mann's movies just as in most such Hollywood genre movies - by the destruction of that body. That is, the heroic man is always physically beaten, injured and brought to breaking point. One needs to add to Willemen's formulation the obvious third stage, in which the hero is permitted to emerge triumphant within the movie's narrative line; this stage conventionally cannot occur before the other two. The third stage obviously provides the security and comfort of closure, and is a crucial element in the production of spectatorial pleasure, but Willemen proposes that both of the first stages of representation are also in their way pleasurable for the spectator - the "first pleasure" that of voyeuristic

> admiration of the hero's body and presence is followed diegetically and graphically by the "unquiet pleasure of seeing the male mutilated… and restored through violent brutality" (1993: 156).

The triumphalist male who is capable of re-emerging in control of himself after having been beaten up and physically humiliated reinstates phallic power and asserts the necessary closure that his momentary collapse had threatened to undermine. Smith argues:

> The pleasure proffered in action movies can be regarded, then, not so much as the perverse pleasure of transgressing given norms, but as at bottom the pleasure of reinforcing them. This is where the narratives of such movies can be justifiably dubbed conservative: they marshal a certain identificatory pleasure into the service of a triumphalist masculinity by employing a process girded around and endlessly reproduced by the narrative conventions of Hollywood and its country's cultural heritage (167).

Despite the need to reinstate a masculine power temporarily called into question by the threat of body dissolution, there is always, as Smith suggests, an "underside, a double-edge, or a residue" (167) which hints at the inability to fix, in strongly demarcated gendered terms, masculine indomitability. Smith observes:

> What is common to many of the action movies and westerns of the sort Eastwood makes is the way in which the exhibition/masochism trope and its pleasure/unquiet pleasure along with the resolution into a triumphalist view of male activity, reside alongside a residual, barely avowed male hysteria. That hysteria is often expressed narratively as the sensation of the dangers inherent in identification with women or with homosexuals (of both genders). Or else it is a hysterical formation that can be glimpsed in moments of incoherence or powerlessness in the male body and in the male presence. Sometimes it is only barely visible in the joins of the text as it produces its apparently seamless cloth. *The hysterical moment I am stressing marks the return of the male body out from under the narrative process that has produced what appears to be its transcendence, but that in fact is its elision and its forgetting* (167). (my italics)

Smith's words acquire a special significance in Peckinpah's work inasmuch as the possibility of transcendence that Smith deems essential to narrative closure and to the vindication of the symbolic - the phallic order - is always impaired, in the latter's case, by a male body

that denies that transcendence since it rarely regenerates into life, it never heals but remains trapped in the realization of its own physical decay. Earth-bound, morally blemished or age-burdened, Peckinpah's protagonists can only achieve transcendence though their own death. The "barely avowed" hysterical strand that Smith discloses in the narratives he describes, featuring Eastwood, can also be perceived in Peckinpah's films but assumes there a more poignant quality: his portrayal of masculinity becomes not so much hysterical as progressively more melancholy because it can never match the idealization that the Western proposes in its generic premises and which Peckinpah nostalgically embraced.

Calling to mind again my initial arguments, centering on the more unproblematic nature of John Wayne and the way he fended off "metaphysical attention" (Wills: 23), we can also assume that this derived from the absence of any effort or strain which we can find in more hard-bodied figures whose strong physiques attempt to suggest "the naturalness" of muscles, which "legitimize male power and domination" (Dyer: 274). Wayne, and Eastwood too, depart from the stripped-naked, gun-toting protagonists - *à la* Stallone - who epitomize an extreme vision of the male individualist opposing tremendous odds. Dyer remarks upon the need to recreate a sense of "readiness for action" (262) that might preclude the erotic/passive quality associated with male images while on display. He states:

> This leads to the greatest instability of all for the male image. For the fact is that the penis isn't a patch on the phallus. The penis can never live up to the mystique implied by the phallus. Hence the excessive, even hysterical quality of so much male imagery. The clenched fists, the bulging muscles, the hardened jaws, the proliferation of phallic symbols - they are all straining after what can hardly be achieved, the embodiment of the phallic mystique (274-275).

By analyzing action heroes Yvonne Tasker argues that images of manhood are mapped out and inscribed in the physical display of the body which is spectacularised and, therefore, rendered an object of desire. She opposes Neale when he construes the image of Rock Hudson in Douglas Sirk's melodramas as "an object of an erotic look" which is "usually marked as female" (Neale 1993: 18). In this sense, by assuming Hudson's feminization,

Neale suggests that any contemplation of the male body entails necessarily its feminization and its attendant disempowerment. Yet, Tasker observes:

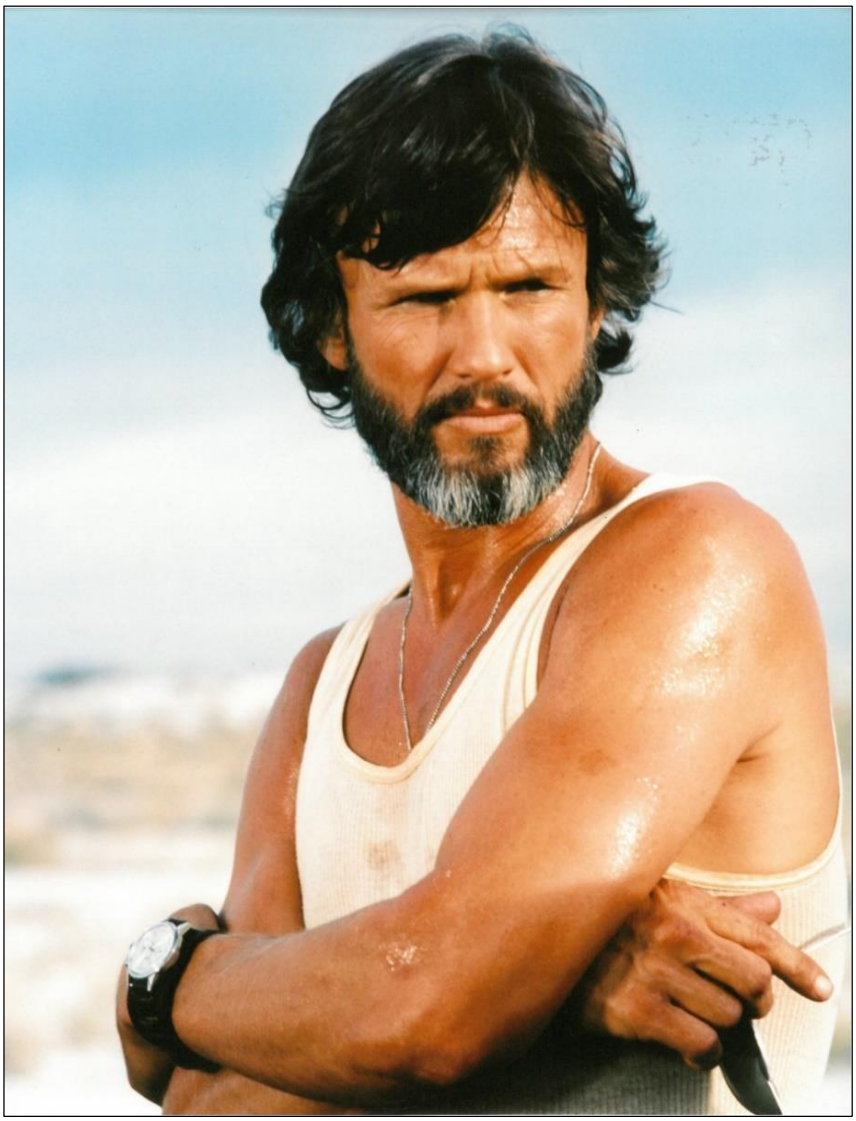
> It is dangerous to rely on the assumed stability of a gender binary, perhaps a question needs to be asked about what it means to place the "male gaze" at the centre of an analysis of the mainstream cinema. What once may have provided an enabling critical concept, now seems almost completely disempowering in its effects, operating as a term which fixes an analysis within the restrictions of the very gendered system it seeks to question (Tasker 1993: 115-116).

The Western with its reliance on stylistic devices that render male images visually appealing has always been an ideal ground to elicit the sexual and erotic appeal of male bodies on display. Neale argues that "while women are investigated, men are tested"(19), but one should not forget that in this constant testing, there is an exploratory, "investigative" probing of the underlying traits of masculinity and a recurrent preoccupation with what being a man signifies. This investigation may entail anxiety as Lehman attempted to prove in his explorations of male nudity in American cinema (1993). While women's nudity can be unabashedly foregrounded, men's display of their near naked bodies is often offset by their engagement with physical or mental activity. Not surprisingly, Martin Pumphrey questioned why cowboys always wear hats in their baths. The recurrent trope of shaving, bathing and washing highlights an image of male heroism that intersects with moral righteousness, but these narrative moments in which the male body might be clearly exposed are always masked by visual props which deflect our attention from nudity. As Pumphrey observes: "Cowboys do not only wear hats in the bath. Trousers, shirts and a range of visually authentic underwear have served the same purpose (1989: 80). He also adds:

> That cowboys wear hats or anything else in the bath points to anxieties about male display that have not only shaped the Western's representations of masculinity but also, I want to argue, have profoundly influenced the processes by which individual (modern) masculinities have traditionally been learned (80).

I have attempted to suggest how cinematic representations of masculinity articulate issues of power and/or disempowerment through the body. In Peckinpah this question is bound

up with melancholia and the sense that bodily impairment and its ultimate destruction through violent death will defy a long-standing tradition which has posited melancholy males as mysterious and "spiritually" elevated. Peckinpah's protagonists, on the contrary, are always trapped in their immanent condition, trying to go somewhere but reaching nowhere. In their melancholy quest, they are always in movement like the massive convoy in one of his most criticized films, *Convoy*. The technological, mechanized body of gigantic trucks emerges here as a phallic surrogate which is further reinforced by the bonding of the male-to-male camaraderie. That Kris Kristofferson often exposes his torso, taking off shirts, putting on tank tops and projecting a languid erotic allure through his muscular physique and his cat-like movement is downplayed by his engagement in driving, bearing out Dyer's arguments that the male pin-up's attention is always focused elsewhere. This may explain why the film is structured around an idea of unmotivated movement where the convoy seems to be rushing nowhere in particular, carrying a mysterious freight that has no substantiality in the economy of real trucking. The false suicidal ending, the Duck's death which the comedy finesses, constitutes Peckinpah's ironic comment on the roaming and drifting which had characterized the nihilistic existence of his previous male protagonists. Here the body is a joker, to use Connell's words, by refusing its own dissolution.



6. Kris Kristofferson as Rubber Duck in Sam Peckinpah's *Convoy*: his look is not directed at the camera, but suggests focused attention to something/someone else.

II- Masculinity in the late 60s and 70s : of impotence and male angst

> "I move around a lot. Not because I'm looking for anything really but 'cause I'm getting away from things which get bad if I stay: auspicious beginnings, you know what I mean?"
>
> Bobby (Jack Nicholson) in *Bob Rafelson's Five Easy Pieces* (1970)

Sam Peckinpah's cinema, in its flirtation with violence, cannot be dissociated from the context of the late sixties and seventies inasmuch as deep transformations took place in the film industry, paving the way for a different relation between audiences and films. Thus, in order to explore his vision of manhood one needs to delve into the representations of masculinity of the turbulent times in which he lived. Bobby Dupea (Jack Nicholson)'s soliloquy in *Five Easy Pieces* as he talks to his crippled, stroke-afflicted father, bespeaks the lack of motivation and purposeless drift which are a defining feature of male protagonists in the New Hollywood of the late sixties and throughout the seventies. A hero who escapes from "auspicious beginnings" because he fears the compromises they might entail is someone cut adrift from any kind of ontological security, running aground in the barrenness of his lassitude and emotional paralysis. As Thomas Elsaesser suggests, the American films of this era are bereft of plot consistency, time linearity, and goal-oriented motivated heroes which had hitherto characterized the cinema of previous decades and where "contradictions were resolved and obstacles overcome by having them played out in dramatic dynamic terms or by personal initiative, whatever the problem, one can do something about it" (1975: 14).

Accordingly, for Elsaesser there is a crisis of motivation which undermines the certainties that have helped construct stable, unassailable male images as "directors seem a little unsure of how to objectify into narrative the mood of indifference, the post-rebellious lassitude which they, rightly or wrongly, assume to predominate in their audiences" (14). Similarly, *The King of Marvin Gardens* (Bob Rafelson, 1972) explores the main character's existential angst, suggesting his depressive state and foregrounding his attempt to come to terms with an uneasy relationship with his blithely reckless brother (Bruce Dern). The lack of motivation requires from the spectator a mental effort to reconstruct events and impart to them a sense of narrative coherence which is always already precluded by what Todd

Berliner names "narrative perversities" (2010: 11). According to Berliner, seventies cinema is characterized by perversity, taken in its literal meaning of "turning around". This is borne out by the lack of plausibility, the absence of a satisfying, foreclosing resolution and the unsettling of the familiar or stable structure which Hollywood classical narratives had always cultivated.

Thus, *The King of Marvin Gardens* starts with David Stabler, Jack Nicholson's character, spinning a six-minute narrative around a childhood event. The camera lingers on his face and one expects to see an interlocutor's reaction to this, as David muses over a poignant experience, dredged up from his past, in a morose voice and with a deadpan expression. One's expectations are thwarted and only after some considerable amount of time do we perceive that the intricately long, but enthralling, yarn is part of a radio show where, as a host, he concocts stories around existential themes. What seems to have been a traumatic confession is revealed as part of a fiction and one is left to wonder whether that was rooted in his real life or just the result of his melancholy-prone imagination. Apropos of the character's dearth of future prospects, his broken-down demeanor and the bleak scenario of home-commuting, Jonathan Kirshner states: "*Marvin Gardens* is laden with a sense of despair, decay and faded dreams" (2012: 71). Similarly, in *The Passenger* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1975), Nicholson's David Locke is a journalist who makes the acquaintance of a man while doing some research in Africa. The latter happens to die of a heart failure in the same hotel in which they are both staying. Unbeknownst to everyone, Nicholson decides to swap his identity with the dead man's and gets entangled in the complicated set of events which shed light on the character's ennui, his solipsistic quest for an unmoored existence and his unwillingness to submit to family and professional ties. Only much later does he come up against the inescapable consequences of someone else's actions when the past catches up with him, as it always does - irrespective of whose past one is willing to embrace. In the aforementioned films, Nicholson adumbrates the ruminating, brooding protagonist in tune with the sense of defeat and even self-loathing that the seventies projected. Again Kirshner argues:

> An international production, *The Passenger* nevertheless takes its place in the new Hollywood story as the capstone of what can be called Nicholson's "alienation

> trilogy", along with *Five Easy Pieces* and *Marvin Gardens*. Each features protagonists who do not fit in contemporary society, and much worse, who are disappointed when they look in the mirror. "However hard you try", Nicholson's David Locke explains, "it stays difficult to get away from your own habits". Like Bobby Dupea and David Stabler, he feels that he should have done better. America should have done better too, but that was another story (75).

The idea that America "should have done better" suffuses these films with disenchantment and grounds the characters' sense of loss and lack of purpose in a larger scenario of political disappointment and social unrest. Moreover, the social and political troubles of the times provided for a pervasive climate of contention which threw into question the postulates which had heretofore supported American ideological myths. As Elsaesser suggests, what less consistent and more flawed male images brought to a refashioned industry was "the almost physical sense of inconsequential action, of pointlessness and uselessness, a radical skepticism, in short about the American virtues of ambition, vision and drive"(15). Carl Plantinga describes how Hollywood cinema provides for affective and emotional experiences which elict, through cognitive play, "concern based-construals" regarding plot and character. This entails spectators' involvement in narrative scenarios which they may be familiar with or even estranged from depending on the innovative traits displayed. Considering Hollywood cinema as a "particularly emotional cinema" (2009: 7), and addressing films in their affect and mood-eliciting power, Plantinga describes how questions of sympathy and allegiance to character's motivation and alignment with the narrative's unravelling can become problematic when goals and actions are morally questionable or when narrative linearity is subverted, as 70s cinema so clearly demonstrated. Bernard F. Dukore's question about Peckinpah's ambivalent male characters is apposite in this context: "Where are our sympathies? With the good guys of course. Are there in fact good guys?" (1999: 25).

This dilution of moral distinctions was dramatized by the cinema of the time and, tied up with social and political dilemmas, implied a corrosive climate of pessimism, doubt and anxiety undermining American ideas of its own exceptionalism. Kirshner argues that:

> Three earthquakes were taking place in the United States in the 1960s, any one of which would have been enough to make for a busy decade: the civil rights movement,

> the domestic social consequences of the Vietnam War and the women's liberation movement. Together, sequentially but also overlapping, they shook the foundations of American society (13).

Moreover, with the revision of the production code in 1966, which allowed a more relaxed attitude to what could be shown on screen, a great many directors raised the stakes in depicting risqué subjects involving sex, violence and profane language. Hollywood had to deal with a fragmented audience, dissatisfied with formulaic family movies and their up-beat resolutions. In a related vein, Peter Lev emphasizes how this period gave enough leeway for directors to exercise creative license which had always been hindered by the Production Code. As Lev suggests: "those who value creativity and risk-taking are strongly attracted to the 'nobody knows anything period' of the 1970s" (2000: 7), adding "If nobody knows anything, then everything is permitted" (7).

The progressive removal of the Motion Picture Production Code had already been foreshadowed in the fifties when Otto Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) was released without the MPAA's seal of approval. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith argues that:

> The heart of the problem lay in the industry itself, with its cumbersome capital-intensive apparatus and above all its largely self-imposed censorship. Unlike some other countries, the American cinema did not have separate censorship or classification categories. All films had to be suitable for everybody and the criteria of suitability were very narrowly defined. The Production Code Administration (PCA), which handled the censorship or pre-censorship of films, was besieged with demands from producers to be allowed to introduce more adult subject matter, and in 1954 and 1956 modifications were made to the code, allowing "mature" subjects such as prostitution, drug addiction, and miscegenation to be shown "if treated within the limits of good taste" (2008: 20).

Interestingly, *The Wild Bunch* witnessed the transition from a refashioned and less obtrusive Production Code to the introduction of CARA (Code and Rating Administration) with its G-M-R-X rating system in 1968. As Stephen Prince suggests, Peckinpah was not a pioneer in refashioning an industry that was already being buffeted by strong winds of change, and yet he benefited from a generalized climate of permissiveness that allowed him some stylistic freedom. Accordingly, Prince remarks:

> His inclination to explore the impulses of human violence was now in synch with a changed film industry that afforded directors more creative freedom and that was institutionally renouncing old rules and taboos. In addition, the social revolution within American society was generating a complex empirical and ideological support system that would legitimize and nourish Peckinpah's personal and creative inclinations (11).

Prior to Peckinpah's groundbreaking work, Arthur Penn had already displayed artistic audacity in revising and subverting conventional narratives modes. His *Mickey One* (1965) features an anxiety-ridden character, who eventually loses his grip on reality. The film transposes into the bleakness of modernity the angst which marred post-war noirish heroes and hindered the success of their quests. Similarly *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), and *Easy Rider* (Peter Fonda, 1969) revolutionized the decade by projecting the disaffection of a younger generation cut adrift from the stifling social and cultural milieu which curtailed their individual choices. *Easy Rider* also proved that a film could reap huge profits even when working on a low budget, small production basis. Whilst *Bonnie and Clyde* was revolutionary in its depiction of violence, preparing the ground for Peckinpah's own spectacles of gore,[8] both *The Graduate* and *Easy Rider* construe generational and geographical topographies as profoundly encroaching on individual freedom. Significantly, male sexuality is also seen as dysfunctional - as in *Bonnie and Clyde* - or even threatened by women's liberated sexuality, as in Penn's *Night Moves* (1975), in which the private eye, whose point of view is skewed and twisted from the outset, also lacks the ability to see the fact that he is being cuckolded by his wife. This inability to see and grasp the meaning of situations pervades revisionist detective movies like Robert Altmans's *The Long Goodbye* (1973) where Elliott Gould's Marlowe, unlike his cinematic predecessors as Philip Marlowe, is incapable of fathoming what lies beneath the surface of a chain of apparently inconsistent events.

Sexuality is another area which had been beyond direct exploitation under the restraints of the Production Code. Classical cinema had worked mainly through sexual innuendo and allusion, smoothing over issues which dealt directly with topics considered sexually

[8] As Prince argues: "Peckinpah then seized the violence theme partly because it had already been placed on the national agenda, and no doubt because it was a fashionable and sexy topic" (44).

unsavory like promiscuity, prostitution or homosexuality and foreclosing on ambiguity through narrative resolution. By the seventies the general availability of the birth control pill had revolutionized sexual behaviors and sexuality was legitimized and even envisaged as desirable out of wedlock. Paul Mazursky's *Bob and Carol, Ted and Alice* (1969) traces the relation between two couples as they strive to adapt to the new scenario of a looser, more free-wheeling, guiltless approach to sexual experimentation. In a related vein, but much bleaker in tone, *Looking for Mr Goodbar* (Richard Brooks, 1977) foregrounds a sexually liberated woman, Teresa (played by Diane Keaton) who picks up men in nightclubs and indulges in occasional sex. That the film posits "a descent-into-hell structure" (Wood 1986: 56) and traces Teresa's degradation through her drug-taking, her deflating sexual encounters and her progressive lack of control over her life and decisions does not completely efface the idea that she represents a liberated character whose rebelliousness is constantly pitted against male heterosexual models tinged by hypocrisy. *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1969) also paved the way for the treatment of homosexuality without the prurient, straitlaced views which had heretofore shrouded gay relationships by framing them within the camouflage of straight relations, as had *Cat under a Hot Tin Roof* (Richard Brooks, 1958). Interestingly, the film was released in the same year as *The Wild Bunch*, grossing even larger profits at the box office than the latter. One can, therefore, argue that the examples presented above have shown how American audiences were eager to embrace more "adult" themes which, by tapping into sexuality or violence, allowed a deeper insight into characters' psychology and offered less escapist, closed-off narratives. As Berliner points out "Classical film making provides a harmonious form into which seventies filmmakers integrate a faint cacophony of incongruous ideas and narrational devices" (2010: 9).

This transformation in American cinema is also the result of the strong impact of European cinema and the fresh approach fostered by a new generation of innovative film makers who were intent on challenging the stale conventions of *le cinema du papa*, as the French directors of *La Nouvelle Vague* so suggestively defined it. Nowell-Smith argues:

> In this perspective, the new cinemas of the 1960s can be seen as bringing to fruition a film culture that came into being mainly in France, Italy, and (to a lesser extent)

> Britain and the USA, in the years immediately after the Second World War. Many future film-makers were to come out of this culture, especially in France but also in Britain, Italy, and elsewhere. It was initially a culture of cine-clubs and small magazines, but it spread rapidly to occupy an important, though always slightly off-centre, position in cultural life (28).

While new British cinema was as much concerned with realism as Italian post-war cinema had been, with directors like Lindsay Anderson or Tony Richardson trying to depict the struggles of the working classes in a grittier manner, on the coat-tails of the *cinema-verité* style of Rossellini or Vittorio De Sica, the French New Wave and its group of intellectuals - mostly critics-turned- directors emerging under the aegis of *Le Cahiers du Cinema* (created in 1951 by André Bazin and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze) - paved the way for an original approach to film making which could be felt not only in its technical features but also in terms of narrative cohesion. Nowell-Smith again argues:

> The search motif, so important to narrative, does not disappear. It is just that characters do not always arrive at the end of their journey. Or the search may be an interior one, where the goal is self-knowledge rather than action on the world. And characters who do have knowledge, but find themselves living in a world over which they have no power, do not for that reason despair or cause the audience to disengage from that struggle (105).

Directors as diverse as Jean Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Alain Renais or Jacques Rivette were interested in the randomness of real life, where not all events end up in coherent, satisfying endings. Moreover, their work was also distinctive in its original technical approach which suited the low budget constraints under which they had to work: the jagged, elliptical style, the recurrent use of jump-cuts and the preference for location shooting are recognizable characteristics of their unconventional personal and political styles which radically altered the viewing experience.

A new cultural atmosphere in film culture satisfied film *cognoscenti* since there was a new generation of movie goers who were more open to experimentalism and curious about European cinema and its cutting-edge traits. The emergence of art-houses gave audiences the possibility to see how a new kind of cinema was gathering momentum and challenging

the more traditional, long-standing film approaches that had been linked with classical film narratives. Kirshner observes:

> As Hollywood shed much of its mainstream audience in the decades following the Second World War, the art houses, which mostly played serious foreign films produced outside the Production Code Authority, grew in both absolute and relative importance. Starting from just a handful after the war, there were around 450 such movie houses by 1960; the greater New York area alone had 150 and was the epicenter of the art film business. In 1959 Ingmar Bergman had five different films screened in the United States, and in the fall of that year the French New Wave crashed on the American shores: Louis Malle's *The Lovers*, François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* and Claude Chabrol's *Les Cousins* played concurrently in New York City. Jean Luc Godard's *Breathless* was not far behind (25).

In Penn's *Night Moves*, Harry Moseby (Gene Hackman)'s wife gets home after having seen Eric Rohmer's A *Night at Maud's*, which she describes as "pretty arty", and while he sits musing on the sofa, watching a baseball game, she asks him who is winning, to which he despondently answers "Nobody, one side's just losing slower than the other". The scene not only points to Harry's *anomie*, his existential anxiety and his lack of drive, positioning him miles away from the goal-oriented Sam Spade or Phillip Marlowe-private eye types, but also chimes in with these new cultural mores whereby getting acquainted with European directors had become an emerging habit for American audiences. Tellingly, whilst the French New Wave's feisty directors were enticed by American cinema and displayed a self-conscious awareness of its generic traits, the same can be said about the new generation of American directors who attempted to keep abreast of the ground-breaking stylistic devices that overseas cinema displayed. As Kirshner states:

> The French New Wave had an enormous influence on the new Hollywood; the affinity was reflected in the label. And indeed, the early efforts of a youthful cohort of American directors, including Francis Ford Coppola, Brian De Palma, Paul Mazursky, and Martin Scorsese, were quite visibly and unabashedly inspired by the French movement. In fact, even though the "seventies films" did not emerge until 1967, the influence of the New Wave was already evident in some transitional films of the mid-60s (29).

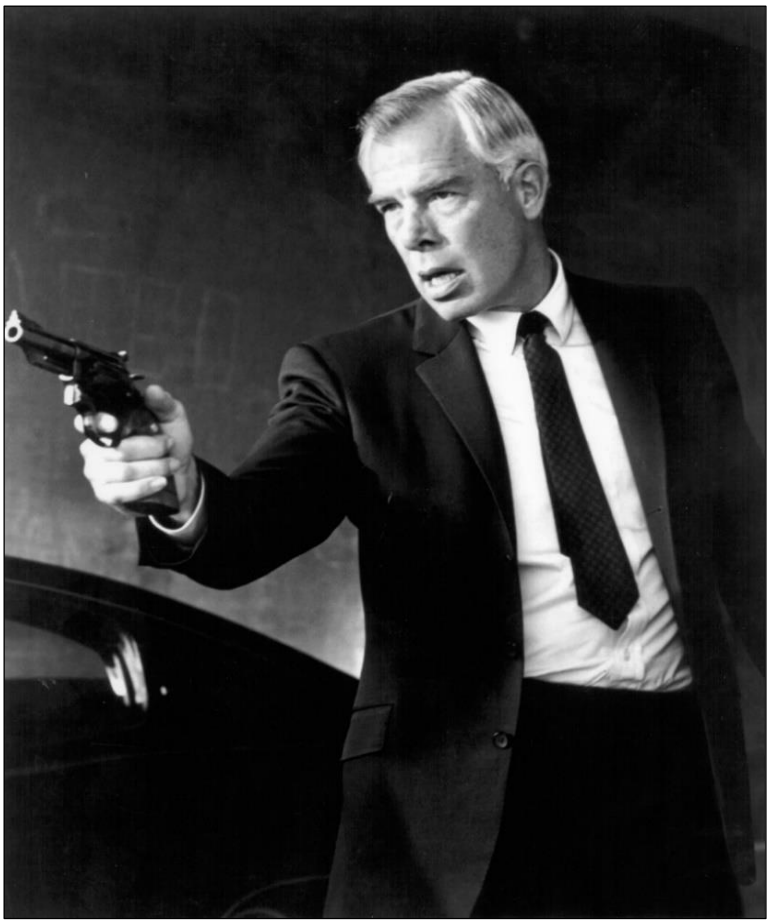
Self-reflexivity became a paramount trait in the seventies and would prepare the ground for cult movie culture whereby audiences "adopt movies, create cults around them, tour through them" (Corrigan 1991: 81). In the process, movies become a self-ingratiating pleasure, "furnishings or acquisitions within which any modern viewer temporarily inhabits and acts out different subjectivities" (81). Significantly, if one can see Nicholson in Antonioni's *The Passenger*, the presence of Jack Palance in Godard's *Le Mépris,*[9] playing the role of an American producer and of Fritz Lang, in a cameo appearance, brings to the fore the flirtation that French cinema has always engaged in with Hollywood cinema. In the seventies, the new approach to cinematic language paved the way for a revisionism whereby directors often indulged in displaying their cognizance *vis-à-vis* film history. The idea that films constantly quote other films, as Berliner argues, "not only makes film making more self-conscious but also reveals the film makers' fascination with film history"(2010: 8). In Martin Scorsese's *Who's that Knocking at my Door?* (1967) J.R, Harvey Keitel's character, dwells on a eulogizing speech about John Ford's *The Searchers*, coaxing his would-be girlfriend into enjoying Westerns as "they solve everybody's problems". He also harps on Lee Marvin's meanness, evoking Liberty Valance and his blithe debauchery, pointing out how he always needed "to break some furniture" when entering a room. This kind of interplay between film narratives, a passionate approach to cinema history which confers upon the spectator the role of accomplice in the pleasure of viewing and establishing connections, fulfils what Corrigan defines as "cult viewing" (1991: 91), in which spectatorship implies a process of appropriation and films offer themselves as vehicles "not for original connotations but for the viewer's potentially constant re-generation of connotations" (90).

In this thriving dialogue between American directors and European cinema one film stands out as an example of the renewed energy produced by many non-linear, subversive seventies narratives. Although released in 1967, *Point Blank* (John Boorman) encapsulates many of the unsettling characteristics that would become distinguishing features in the

[9] *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*) inspired Martin Scorsese's *Casino* (1995). As Kolker argues: "The romance of *Casino* has more melodramatic roots, and emerges directly from other film- Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* - that deals with sexuality in a very European context- enthrallment, debasement, abjection and death" (2000: 203).

seventies. The film is an exercise in late 60s angst and offers a disturbing prefiguring of masculinity which bears a special resemblance to Peckinpah's flawed male images. Drawing upon the heist-gone haywire form that goes back to forerunners like Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) or Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956) - both starring Sterling Hayden - the film is also a revenge movie as Walker played by Lee Marvin is shot and left to die, double-crossed by his best friend and wife who keep his share of the heist, his coveted $93000. Interestingly, the film showcases many of the stylistic devices that became favorites in Peckinpah's cinematic language, like the slow motion technique and jarring, disjointed temporal discontinuities. Lee Marvin behaves in an almost robot-like manner, a man who emerges from the dead and is shorn of any humanity, only obsessed with and intent on recovering his money. His emotionless stance is remarked upon by other characters, especially Walker's wife, Lynne (Sharon Acker) who sadly grieves "I dream about you and how good it must be being dead" and Chris (Angie Dickinson) who chastises his solipsistic quest "You died at Alcatraz, alright". The idea that the world of old-time gangsters has become an anonymous, faceless corporation with desk-bound secretaries and a powerful organization headquartered in modern, minimalist-furnished buildings points to the same world that Peckinpah depicts in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* or *The Killer Elite*. Moreover, the devastating effect of betrayal reverberates through the narrative and heralds the ontological damage that deception and disillusionment generates in the characters' psyche. Walker's obsession with retrieving his $93,000 is belied by his final indifference: when he can eventually get his money in Alcatraz, completing the circle of his ordeal, he walks away into the shadows, ghost-like, hinting at his own emotional estrangement from everything and everyone. Tellingly, the film aroused the same animosity between studio producers and its director that Peckinpah's work would do. As Krishner observes:

> In 1967, however, this kind of film making was still relatively unfamiliar and it generated conflicts during the shoot and in post-production, with battles commonly drawn across generational lines. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was still run by the last generation of old Hollywood executives, and Boorman had nothing but conflicts with the power brokers of his studio, who were "bewildered and dismayed" by what he was doing. From meeting to meeting, screening to screening, baffled executives were unhappy with the story, its bleakness and confusing ambiance (41).



7. Lee Marvin as the affectless Walker pursuing an aimless, personal vendetta in John Boorman's *Point Blank.*

Interestingly, in Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973) there is a scene where Charlie (Harvey Keitel) stands outside a movie theatre talking to Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro) and above them the camera focuses upon a poster for *Point Blank*, with Lee Marvin ominously pointing a gun at Johnny's head, a harbinger for the character's tragic denouement. That a director as virtuoso as Scorsese could allude to Boorman's film - the film is punctuated by many other allusions such as to Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953) or Ford's *The Searchers* - confirms the cross-referencing that permeates many movie literate 70s films. Moreover, *Point Blank* illustrates the conceptual incongruities that Berliner associates with seventies cinema which he defines as "lack of connectedness among the ideas generated by a film" (2010: 27). According to Berliner, these incongruities, stemming from the aforementioned narrative perversities, can be perceived in many different ways. They can be moral or

ideological, when different ethical beliefs or ideological systems are pitted against each other, or even factual, when facts contradict each other within the frame of the narrative. Moreover, they can also entail logical inconsistencies, when events contradict reason; and finally "characterological inconsistencies, when characters behave in ways inconsistent with their previous characterizations "(27).

If moral incongruities abound in 70s cinema, since many a time anti-heroes take center stage and one roots for them even when they behave amorally - like Michael Caine in Mike Hodges's *Get Carter* (1971) or Gene Hackman in William Friedkin's *The French Connection* (1971) - the lack of narrative causality or the breakdown of a moral code that might galvanize protagonists into goal-oriented action bear out the factual or logical incongruences that are discernible in films like *Point Blank* or *Five Easy Pieces*. When in *Five Easy Pieces*, Nicholson's Bobby, returning from the oil fields where he works, is caught in a car jam while driving with his workmate, one is suddenly jolted by his jumping onto the back of a truck and his unexpected playing of a Chopin piece on the piano that the truck is shipping somewhere. Until this moment, one was cued to believe that Bobby's world was limited to the shabby life of a blue-collar worker but this sudden twist hints at the character's educationally privileged background, only explained much later in the narrative. This kind of inconsistency, disturbing linearity, unsettling and thwarting modern expectations, is quintessentially of the 70s. Robin Wood would talk about the "incoherent text" of the decade putting forward arguments which concur with Berliner but are more ideologically loaded since Wood sheds light into the way 70s cinematic production challenges patriarchal structures and unsettles hegemonic fixed gender roles. Whilst Berliner concentrates more on the extent 70s film narratives steer away from the norm by introducing narrative incoherence that alters the viewing experience, Wood is more intent on unveiling the strain that the films' internal contradictions exert on the dominant ideology. As he states: "We can already look back to Hollywood in the seventies as the period when the dominant ideology almost disintegrated" (1986: 69).

Suffice it to say, 70s directors reflected through their work and self-conscious approach to film directing and film history a penchant for defiance, for flouting conventions and for

challenging “the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie”, to recall Bunuel. This tendency mirrored the societal convolutions of the decade. As Wood observes:

> The artist’s perception of experience may be that it is incoherent, chaotic, absurd, meaningless; he may alternatively, be battling against what he perceives as false experience (enslavement by the illusory order of the dominant ideology) and may deliberately produce texts that are fractured and fragmentary. In such cases the fragmentation - the consciously motivated incoherence - becomes a structuring principle, resulting in works that reveal themselves as perfectly coherent once one has mastered their rules (1986: 46).

In this vein, Anthony Barker also observes:

> At the end of the sixties American filmmakers took up the challenge of looking and acting bad and ugly. In the seismic upheavals which afflicted America in the 1960s and 1970s, ugliness was truth, truth ugliness. It allowed cineastes to discover the mean streets of America’s inner cities, to get the flavour of how underprivileged minorities lived (in Blaxploitation movies), to show sex as frequently a sordid commercial transaction, to show that corruption was systemic and not just the few “bad apples” the production code had insisted upon (2013: 22).

It becomes relevant that only in the seventies, which wallowed in the filth of mean streets, stars like Gene Hackman, Dustin Hoffman or Jack Nicholson would be given prominence in roles laying bare emotional or sexual inadequacy or anxiety-induced paralysis. It is no wonder that in the transition to the eighties, as Barker observes: “Short and bespectacled leading men, Dustin Hoffman or Gene Hackman, gave way to more conventionally good looking leading men like Harrison Ford and Sylvester Stallone” (31). Tom Berliner also highlights how seventies films can be perceived either as genre breakers or genre benders. He states:

> A genre breaker loudly broadcasts its violation of tradition, inviting audiences to join in the film’s efforts to expose, and often mock, genre conventions. In contrast a genre bender violates conventions without advertising the fact. A genre bender relies on viewers’ habitual responses to generic codes, thereby misleading them to expect a conventional outcome. The film seems true to form at first, then, like a booby trap, it catches the spectator off-guard (2001: 25).

Genre breakers relish exposing standard tropes and in subverting generic constraints and contrivances, arousing the viewers' complicity into debunking familiar codes by relying on his/her own cognizance of film genres. An example of this would be Altman's *McCabe and Mrs Miller* (1971) which demythologizes the Western frontier and the role of the self-assured male, here reduced to a profit-driven, ineffectual, simpleton. Genre benders capitalize on generic conventions but bend and stretch them by inserting elements of novelty which de-familiarize expected scenarios and thus "audiences feel uneasy and uncertain about the meaning of the film" (2001: 26). Berliner gives particular salience to Friedkin's *The French Connection,* which fits into the cop-thriller norm but departs from its conventions, introducing unnerving, incoherent elements that catch viewers off-guard. He also references *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975) as a genre bender inasmuch as, while relying on conventions of the caper movie, it introduces elements of disruption which tend to unsettle spectators' assumptions about the genre. Berliner sheds light on the way the film "injects ordinary concerns into its extraordinary central event, concerns that have no business in a caper movie" (2001: 29). One of the most striking disruptive elements is the protagonist Sonny (Al Pacino) who, as the narrative unravels, assumes his bisexuality, stating that the bank robbery was entered into to pay for his boyfriend's sex-change operation. These seemingly incoherent events have an unsettling impact on viewers who struggle to accommodate, within their generic expectations, unpredictable aspects of difference and novelty.

Coeval examples like the ones referenced above locate Peckinpah's work in a cultural atmosphere which favours revisionism and coaxes directors into assuming a reinterpreting, demystifying stance. The Western, as a traditional film form that had always held aloft moral absolutes, was an ideal ground to reflect on American ideological underpinnings. As Kirshner writes:

> The revisionist Western was a particularly ripe terrain because it allowed the disillusionment of the 1970s to take the classical myths and tropes of the Western and turn them completely on their heads. The conquest of the frontier could be interpreted as American imperial expansionism; the bittersweet march of "civilization" (with its economic and environmental exploitation) and the suppression of the savage Indians could be retold as a genocidal project that offered direct parallels both to the Vietnam war and to smoldering racial issues at home (111).

Moreover, Sergio Leone played a pivotal role in revising the generic premises of the genre. His cynical Man with No Name (Clint Eastwood) broke new ground by embodying an opportunistic, money-driven hero who ran counter to the codes of the old West. As Prince points out:

> Leone's westerns did not feature much spurting blood or squib-work, but they piled up a huge number of bodies on screen and cut western violence lose [sic] from the moralizing that had always accompanied it in the pre-Leone Hollywood period. In Leone's West, violent death was quick, viewed dispassionately, stripped off the ritualizing codes that had surrounded it in Hollywood Westerns (18).

Soldier Blue (Ralph Nelson, 1970) and *Little Big Man (*Arthur Penn, 1970) also attempted to disrupt the negative portrayal of the savage Indian, the former destabilizing the tropes of captivity tales as Kathy (Candice Bergen)'s familiarity with the Indian's way of life is not a reason for self-defilement, resulting from sexual contact with the Other - as it had been portrayed in *The Searchers* - but rather for personal growth and self-sufficiency. Unlike Ford (with the exception of *Fort Apache,* 1948), both films align the cavalry with unwarranted and irresponsible acts of violence. *Little Big Man* lays bare General Custer's narcissism and posits the Indian way of life as a more fulfilling, communally-inspired alternative which is measured against a corrupt and hypocritical western society. The bloody massacres at the end of both films extrapolate diegetic, narrative limits and turn a critical glance on the violence that characterized America's involvement in the Vietnam conflict. Significantly, Peckinpah was deeply disgusted by the Vietnam War and its appalling contours. Prince also argues: "For Peckinpah the violence consuming America constituted a kind of social insanity" (34). In this sense, he was particularly distressed by the violence of the My Lai massacre and even more disturbed by the way the case was sloughed off in the courts.[10] Interestingly, Peckinpah often argued that the Western offered the ideal terrain to assert a critical viewpoint in relation to the political and social convolutions of the times. Apropos of this, Prince mentions:

[10] As Peckinpah remarked, quoted by Stephen Prince, "Nixon's pardoning Calley was so distasteful to me that it makes me really want to puke" (37). Calley was the lieutenant in charge of the deadly attack on a Vietnam village.

> When asked in 1969 why he didn't make a film about Vietnam, if he wanted to make a film against War and violence, he offered his oft quoted reply: "The Western is a universal frame within which it is possible to comment on today (34).

A film like *The Missouri Breaks* (Arthur Penn, 1976) is touched by the same existential precariousness that characterizes Peckinpah's universe: doom-laden individualists who fail to survive in a new socially refashioned landscape, suggesting, as *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* had done, that the outlaws' way of life has been encroached upon by economic interests. The horse rustlers headed by Nicholson's character are trapped by the big ranchers, Chisum-like figures "who want to put a fence around this country" as Kristofferson/Billy had already claimed. Brando's Regulator Lee Clayton is a sexually ambiguous, flamboyant figure who exudes an atypically feminized lilac smell and whose aberrant behavior suggests his corrupt nature. The film touches upon one of Peckinpah's recurrent themes, the demise of a romanticized, albeit beleaguered, individualism which had always found a home in Western narratives. As Lee Clayton sadistically says to a body-scorched and suffering Harry Dean Stanton: "You're the last of your kind, old man. If I were a better businessman than I'm a man-hunter, I'd put you in a circus". The same idea of anachronism will be recuperated much later under the thrust of a renewed interest in the genre with films like *All the Pretty Horses* (Billy Bob Thornton, 2000) or *Open Range* (Kevin Costner, 2003). It becomes significant that Arthur Penn, like Peckinpah himself, mourns the loss of utopian dreams through his disenchanted *Alice's Restaurant* (1969) where the possibility of a communal life, so much embedded in the 70s left-liberal frame of mind, is precluded by the pressures and constant intrusions of the bourgeois world. Despite this common ground, Peckinpah's replaying of a melancholy dirge in relation to idealism is less often perceived as a strongly political stance, than it is in Penn's *oeuvre*, but rather, it is seen as an angst-ridden mood which informs his work with an almost depressive and paralyzing, nostalgia.

This dearth of certainties and lack of motivational drives which haunts most late 60s and 70s heroes take the form in Peckinpah's work of a melancholy brooding over the inability to recuperate the soothing, clear-cut ethos of the old Western. The passing of the frontier, the destructive encroachment of corporate powers on individualist heroes, and their

consequent marginalization, imparts to his work a quality of melancholia which is greatly reflected in the breakdown of masculine assurance. This melancholia will be addressed in a chapter of its own. Peckinpah's protagonists, unlike Bobby in *Five Easy Pieces*, do not escape from auspicious beginnings because for them the idea of beginning, auspicious or otherwise, is hampered right from the outset. As Dutch says when Pike in *The Wild Bunch* musingly confesses his wish to retire and back off: "*Back off to what?"*

III- Masculinity in the films of Sam Peckinpah: of losers, drifters and old timers

"I'd like to be able to make a Western like Kurosawa makes Westerns."[11]
Sam Peckinpah

"Women and barbed wire are the two greatest civilizing agents in this country"
John L. Bridges (Jeff Bridges) in Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* (1980)

That John (Jeff Bridges) in Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* aligns women with barbed wire, in an amusing remark which is proffered in one of the happiest renditions of the immigrant community spirit - the ice skating dance sequence - bespeaks a feeling which the Western had always articulated: women ring-fence men and trap them in emasculated, domestic roles to the same extent that the barbed wire closes off the frontier and assigns free land to powerful landowners, foreclosing on the roaming, rootless existence of the quintessential Western hero. This has always constituted a staple feature in the genre: how far can masculinity survive domesticity? In *The Westerner* (William Wyler, 1940), Cole (Gary Cooper) ends up with the female character and gives up on his dream of going to California. Likewise, one just has to evoke Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) and envision the film's ending with a more promising future for the blemished John Wayne's Ringo and the snubbed Claire Trevor's Dallas, who ride away together from the blessings of civilization and into an "auspicious beginning"

And yet, these resolutions seem to be an exception in the Western landscape, where rugged individualism has always marked masculinity. In Budd Boetticher's cluster of Westerns starring Randolph Scott the hero is always a loner, just passing through, heading towards other destinations, as in *Buchanan Rides Alone* (1958). Even if the protagonist's past is aligned with a domestic, married life, his present is riven by poignant memories of loss as his wife has died, a hapless casualty of a shootout, as happens in *Seven Men from Now* (1956), or viciously killed on a "hang tree" as in *Ride Lonesome* (1959) or even abducted by the Indians as in *Comanche Station* (1960). This fact dooms the hero to a

[11] Sam Peckinpah in an interview with Ernest Callenbach in "A Conversation with Sam Peckinpah". Film Quarterly, vol.17, nº2 (Winter- 1963-64) p: 10.

roaming life in the quest for revenge. Surprisingly, in *Decision at Sundown* (1957), Scott's character's Bart rides into town to take revenge on the man who had seduced his wife leading her to suicide. In a very atypical manner, Scott appears as a cuckolded husband whose obsession with killing stems from wounded masculine pride, which inadvertently culminates in his sidekick's death. In all Boetticher's Westerns the protagonist is guilt-ridden, attempting to heal his emotional bruises by displaying a restraint that would border on a profound melancholia if it weren't so close to static "laconic frankness" (Kitses 2004: 181). Likewise, in Anthony Mann's *Man of the West* (1958), Link (Gary Cooper) has forsaken a past of crime and in his first appearance in the film, he has the bearing of a respectable citizen who has come into town to hire a school teacher, intent on bringing civilizing values to the community in which he has settled down and married. Despite this, it is his violence-riddled past that he has to confront when he meets up again with his old criminal companions, headed by the depraved Doc Tobin (Lee J.Cobb). The film is built around this confrontation and its tragic implications for the hero's damaged psyche, evoking a more contemporary, and graphic, rendition of the same trope, David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* (2005) where Tom (Viggo Mortensen)'s uneventful existence is suddenly disturbed by the exposure of his violent past.

The way brawn as opposed to brain is construed as sexually more appealing to women can be traced back to a film like William Wyler's *The Big Country* (1958), which pits Gregory Peck's Eastern effeteness and non-violent stance against Charlton Heston's Western-grounded aggressive masculinity. The film seems to endorse the former's position against a background where men are supposed to assert their masculinity through physical strength in foolish displays of one-upmanship, something which is deemed, as the narrative unfolds, a cultural and social imposition. Despite debunking these imposed pressures, Peck's character is perceived by the community as cowardly, losing the respect of his Western-born fiancé. However, it is clear that his image of manhood is one of strength that does not need the others' approbation to be legitimized. Inasmuch as it tried to subvert a long-lived construction of masculinity premised on cool restraint and marksmanship, where a "man's gotta do what a man's gotta do", Wyler's film provided an alternative vision

of manhood, one predicated on diplomacy, dialogue and pacifist negotiation. In a similar vein, John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (1962) also explores how the image of a sturdy, competent manhood as epitomized by Wayne's Tom Doniphon is ultimately vindicated by making it more sexually alluring to the female gaze. If Hallie (Vera Miles) had initially been drawn to Stoddart (James Stewart)'s civilizing agency and intellectual qualities, it is Tom she grieves for at the end when she returns to Shinbone to attend the latter's funeral. It may be argued that Ford utilizes female loss and mourning, probing the female character's libidinal attachment to an object of love and sexual desire, to glorify Tom and his iconic manhood, which is thus nostalgically marked by its obsolescence.

Sam Peckinpah's cinema is primarily focused on masculinity and dwells on differing male images which he constantly pits against each other; it is in this sense a "world of danger, a world of men, a world without women" as Stransky (Maximillian Shell) says in *Cross of Iron*. As a "necessary nuisance", to use Stransky's words again, women appear as mainly decorative elements, offering a solace for men's grievances, like Teresa or Eva (both played by the Austrian actress Senta Berger) in respectively *Major Dundee* and *Cross of Iron*. Although some critics have not been wrong in seeing certain female characters emerge in a positive light in Peckinpah's films (Simons and Merrill: 1984; Mesce Jr: 2001, Fulwood: 2002), it is apparent that Peckinpah was intent on creating a plethora of male characters who test their mettle in an often hostile environment and struggle for their own survival in a changing world which appears unrecognizable in its modern, shifting contours. They invariably emerge as losers, internally damaged and socially excluded.

Douglas Pye highlights how the Western, like other genres of male action, was relegated to a minor position in film criticism in the mid-seventies, when feminist-inspired theorization concentrated mainly on film noir and the melodrama, attempting to bring into relief how women were under or negatively represented and disclosing phallocentric discursive practices that lurked underneath those representations. As Pye observes apropos of the genre's relegation to oblivion, it became "the ghost town of genre criticism" (1996: 11). Moreover, since the genre had always relied on traditional images of masculinity, its generic conventions "became embarrassing" (11). A renewed interest in the way

masculinity was represented onscreen gathered momentum in the 1990s after years of feminist theorization forged by Mulvey's seminal work on women's *looked-at-ness* and the exhaustive reliance on "Althusser and Lacanian paradigms" (Powerie *et al* 2004: 2). In this way, it seems relevant that Peckinpah's work has reemerged in gender studies and been given more detailed attention in recent years insofar as it offers a felicitous terrain to reflect on issues like the disquieting alignment of violence with masculine representations. This infuses his work with a destabilizing quality which has made him a continuing influence on more contemporary directors like Quentin Tarantino, John Woo, Martin Scorsese or Oliver Stone. In fact, Prince argues that the question of violence in Peckinpah's work should be tackled and not circumvented by spurious arguments. As he states:

> We could seek to legitimize that work by claiming that its violence is only secondary and a lesser component of other thematic and stylistic interests that lie essentially elsewhere (e.g the vanishing West or the vicissitudes or travails of friendship) but if we argue, as I do here, that the inquiry into violence is the most important, and basic, component of Peckinpah's work, and if we can see clearly where that inquiry has led contemporary cinema, then this might seem to foreclose on the usefulness of closely studying these films. After all, doesn't that violence make them a known quantity? But this is not the case. By confronting the violence issue directly and unravelling the volatile problems with which it is entangled, we can position Peckinpah's work more precisely and gauge its singular importance in the history of American cinema (XVI).

In Prince's opinion what is distinctive in Peckinpah's representation of violence and its association with masculinity is the melancholy view that violence is in itself damaging, rendering the subjects powerless and de-humanized. For Prince, Peckinpah's rendition of bloodshed and gory scenarios through squib work, slow-motion techniques and the loss of human volition, as bodies are shot and wounded, was meant to create in the spectator a cathartic effect and the capacity to reflect on the vicarious pleasures elicited by violence. This view is borne out by Peckinpah himself in the interviews he gave in which many a time he had to defend himself against the castigation he received by the press. In his 1972 interview to *Playboy* he stated in relation to his notorious flirtation with violence:

> One of my big themes. But if you want to find out about violence in this country, you ought to talk to the people in our prisons, as I've been doing lately in connection with

> *The Getaway*. Those guys will wake you up. For them it's a way of life, a life lived according to certain codes. There are some things you do and others you don't. The whole thing is built into the fabric of their lives as it was for those cats in *The Wild Bunch*. They were people who lived not only by violence but for it. But the whole underside of our society has always been violent and still is (Hayes 2008: 107).

Peckinpah wanted to direct spectators' consciousness to the violent world he portrayed but this implied moral stance was undercut by the enthralling stylized set-pieces he recurrently reenacted and by the fascinating image of gun-shot bodies losing control and volition: an image of a fractured masculinity always already compromised by its own fragility and corporeality. Bringing to mind Steve Neale's argument, it can be seen that Peckinpah's copious provision of violence foregrounds the male body as spectacle not only in the deployment of competence in directing this violence to others (like Steve McQueen or Al Lettieri in *The Getaway*) but also in the sadistic and/or masochistic - depending on one's identification with aggressor or victim - pleasure afforded by watching the male body disintegrating and collapsing in spurts of blood. Carl Plantinga also elaborates on the way Hollywood cinema is capable of transforming negative emotions into positive ones which may justify why so many spectators expose themselves to spectacles of pain, suffering or even, and this is particularly salient in Pekinpah's work, disgust. He argues that this process implies not only the purging of negative emotions but what he calls a "working through and resolution that must occur, in part, on the level of cognition" (2009: 178). Plantinga higlights how American cinema relies on sensorial, affect-eliciting engagement through various aesthetic techniques among which the power of the *arresting image*, which has been undervalued in more psychoanalytical film theory. He thus argues:

> In relation to the spectator's response, the two relevant terms are not the purgation of emotion but the relief from strong negative emotions, which are *replaced* by pleasurable emotions that depend for their strength on the arousal caused by physiological spillover remaining from the prior negative emotions. What is channeled is the physiological residue of the painful emotions, which through emotional "spillover" increases the strength of the positive emotions at the film's end. I call this the "spillover effect" (184).

If we think about Peckinpah's cinema and the way he used technical devices to produce an extremely sensorial, visceral experience, Plantinga's words seem appropriate.

In a comparative analysis of Peckinpah and Oliver Stone, Sylvia Chong points out how *The Wild Bunch* received a NC-17 rating in 1994[12], derailing Warner Brothers' plans to re-release the film on its 25th anniversary. As she argues, this notorious classification was "usually reserved for explicit sexual intercourse" (2004: 249) and it appeared at odds with the film's outdated representation of violence when compared with other violent films in the same year like Stone's *Natural Born Killers* and Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. Chong dwells on the idea that violence has been equated with obscenity because its visual impact is also predicated on disturbing the bodily boundaries between inside and outside, rendering visible the signifier of body dissolution and dissolving: blood. Relying on Linda Williams's analysis of pornography and her reference to the "money shot" (1999: 8), the moment the male orgasm is made apparent through the release of semen, Chong argues that violence operates in "blood auteurs" (252), like Peckinpah and Stone, in the same way pornography seeks to visually represent the "truth" of sexual pleasure. She states:

> Although this connection may be purely coincidental or ideologically motivated, it indicates several formal similarities between film pornography and film violence. Both genres strive to make visible internalized effects - of pleasure and pain respectively, although not exclusively. As the discourse of sexuality revolves around some hidden "truth" of pleasure which it seeks to expose, so does the discourse around violence revolve around a hidden "truth" of pain. Because affects are situated inside the body, their transition requires a visible signifier to violate the boundary from within the body to without. In violence that privileged signifier is blood, while in hard core pornography it is semen (2004: 253).

These considerations call to mind many of the reactions of physical disgust and outrage that the first screening of *The Wild Bunch* ignited (Weddle 1994: 5) and position violence at the heart of the controversy aroused by this film and subsequent ones. In that sense, Chong does not totally embrace Prince's vision that Peckinpah's violence is etched in the "authorial intent" (2004: 260) to coax spectators into cathartic, rational meditation since that is impeded by the fascination created by the aesthetic extravaganza of blood balletic.

[12] In "The Homeric Power of Peckinpah's violence" in *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1994), pp: 116-121, Michael Sragow also accounts for the process which led to the cancelling of the film's exhibition in 1993 in its original director's cut. This was due to the MPAA rating board which derailed Warner Brothers' plans by giving the film a NC-17 rate.

Chong's vision highlights how in film violence, as much as in pornography, there is a collapse between signs and referents creating "a material and stylistic excess" (260) which undermines a director's mastery over the reception of his/her texts. What seems to be relevant in these opposing views is that both seem to project Peckinpah's double-bind position in relation to the violent scenarios he recurrently reenacts in his films: if spectators might oscillate between repulsion and fascination, Peckinpah was also enthralled by the aesthetic impact such images could have even though he wanted to "lead viewers towards greater self-knowledge and control their own darker appetites" (Prince: 31).

If, as Rutherford states, "The dominant meanings of masculinity in our culture are about producing our bodies as instruments to our wills" (1988: 26), I contend that Peckinpah foregrounds the male body as always endangered by its own dissolution, through physical decay, inadequacy or incompetence and ultimately death. His heroes fail to turn their bodies into instruments as their bodies are maimed and physically scarred. Steve Neale appositely observes that nostalgia in the Western operates in "terms of the theme of lost or doomed male narcissism" (15) which is transposed onto the body and inscribed as physical impairment. He elaborates on this by stating:

> The clearest example would be Peckinpah's Westerns: *Guns in the Afternoon* (1962), *Major Dundee* (1965) (to a lesser extent), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), and especially, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973). These films are shot through with nostalgia, with an obsession with images and definitions of masculinity and masculine codes of behavior, and with images of male narcissism and the threats posed to it by women, society, and the law. *The threat of castration is figured in the wounds*, suffered by Joel McCrea in *Guns in the Afternoon*, Charlton Heston in *Major Dundee*, and William Holden in *The Wild Bunch*. The famous slow-motion violence, bodies splintered and torn apart, can be viewed at one level at least as the image of narcissism in its moment of disintegration and destruction (15). (my italics)

One of the most striking evidences of this is demonstrated by *The Killer Elite* wherein Mike Locken (James Caan), after having been shot by his erstwhile friend and "buddy cat" George Hansen (Robert Duvall), undergoes a painful recovery which is portrayed in exacting detail in the first part of the narrative. Not only is the film about the gnawing wound of betrayal - an obsessive theme in Peckinpah's *oeuvre* - but also about the physical torment of

rehabilitation. Having been strategically shot in both elbow and knee cap, Mike becomes a cripple who literally limps his way through revenge. As Cordell Strug argues:

> The real elite, we see, as an image of contrast, is the hospital staff. Almost a quarter of the movie is devoted to surgery and rehab, with its frustrations and humiliations. But the surgeons are cold, business-like, detached. They are everything Mike is not. In fact, Mike fails to do the two things that he sets to do: kill Hansen and come back to his job. These goals cease to matter to him. But he can no more give himself what he needs than the surgeons can (Bliss 2012: 142).

Peckinpah goes to great lengths to depict Mike's physical and psychological agony as he attempts to gain control over his body again and to make it an instrument for killing. The minutiae of hospital procedures and the process of rehabilitation evoke the predicament of Vietnam veterans in films like *Coming Home* (Hal Ashby, 1978) or *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989). Peckinpah's bitter vision of the world is articulated through his critical stance towards corrupt power systems which operate on the sly and use men like Locken to do their dirty work. This is voiced by Mac (Burt Young), the more working class underling, who exposes the deceit on which these faceless organizations rely: "All the wheelers and dealers at the top with their gin and fizzes, they need guys like you to do their bloodletting, while they are busy doing their speeches about freedom and progress", he remarks forcefully as he chides Locken for his obsessive quest for revenge. The privately-run secret service organization, Comteg, for which both Locken and Hansen had worked, is the embodiment of a corporative power structure, evoking a kind of Chisum-like-big-rancher turned into a sleek, smooth-talker criminal. As Cap Collis (Arthur Hill) argues in the film "heroism has become old-fashioned", a remark which elicits Locken's bitter rejoinder: "If a guy can blow up his best friend what's the morality in this world?" Tellingly, whilst this argument underscores Peckinpah's disenchanted vision of a world where corruption seeps through into all areas of life, in more conventional action-packed films corruption is hardly seen as systemic but is oftentimes epitomized by evil individuals who should be destroyed so that order can be reestablished. This task is assigned to morally untarnished protagonists whose exceptional qualities vindicate their roles as protectors. As Susanne Kord and Elizabeth Krimmer observe:

> In the light of this preference for psychology over politics, it is hardly surprising that corruption, which features prominently in many contemporary films, is hardly ever portrayed as systemic but rather as the result of the moral failure of particular individuals (2011: 8).

Through Locken's predicament, his desperate attempt to gain control over his own body and become employable again, Peckinpah points to the way many of the tensions that beset masculinity, and its need to constantly reassert itself, are articulated through the body and the way it can be instrumental in projecting competence. In this line of thought, Rutherford observes:

> The historical construction of masculinity is closely bound up with Christianity's attitude to the human body: the separation of the superior spirit from the weak flesh. It's a tradition that has become the dominant mode of West European thought. When Rene Descartes wrote his famous words, "I think therefore I am" he was insisting on the primacy of reason. A history of masculinity is the struggle to tame and subdue the emotional and sexual self and to recognize the ascendant and superior nature of reason and thought (1988: 25-26).

The body is, therefore, a canvas on which power or weakness is inscribed and its failings and shortcomings trace the trajectory which masculinity has to undergo to legitimize its authority. I will argue that Peckinpah's construction of male heroics falls well short of endorsing an inviolable masculinity inasmuch as his heroes denote signs of crisis. Peter Lehman, analyzing how representations of the male body appear tied up with "cultural assumptions about the relation between the male body and certain attributes of masculinity" (1993: 104), elaborates on Hawks's *Rio Lobo* (1970) and argues that "the male loss is marked not by a disfigurement but by crippling, that is, a limitation of the power to act. For this reason, leg injuries are probably the most common male equivalent of the female scarred face" (1993: 61). This evokes Pike and Major Dundee's leg injuries and the way they project physical - and symbolic - diminishment.

8. The male body disintegrating in the Agua Verde bloodshed. Here through Pike's final débâcle.

In another interesting reading of the crisis of masculinity which more recent cinema articulates, Peter Lehman argues that the recurrent graphic representation of limp and dead penises hints at the anxiety over a besieged manhood and the yawning gap between actual masculinities, operating in a social context of diminished expectations, and the phallic symbolic practices which had hitherto reinforced structures that have culturally empowered men. The striking visual impact of these lifeless appendages is a token for the grief for the loss of this empowerment. As Lehman states:

> Some films with dead penis imagery fall in-between the mainstream, narrative and independent, experimental traditions. Despite their differences, all these films contribute to a discourse about the importance or lack thereof, of the penis in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. As such they betray a fascination with the penis and either an anxiety about or near jubilation with the possible cultural

> demotion from an object of awe, and mystique to one of little or no importance (2004: 196).

Drawing upon mainstream films like *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992) - which foregrounds in its opening scene the image of a male corpse with its genitals exposed - and exploring European, more experimental, avant-guarde examples, Lehman highlights how the dead-penises imagery acquires a metaphorical dimension which purports to debunk the associations of phallic power that have clung to the living physical organ. This brings to mind how Connell articulates the exploration of masculinity with its bodily materiality:

> Bodies, in their own right as bodies, do matter. They age, get sick, enjoy, engender, give birth. There is an irreducible bodily dimension in experience and practice; the sweat cannot be excluded (51).

Murat Aydemir, analyzing how masculinity has been threatened by a decrease in sperm count which "fits in with the perceived crises of masculinity, heterosexuality, family and the nation (2007: xv), explores how sperm and ejaculation have been inscribed in representational discourses which tend to construe a bodily manifestation as coterminous with phallic, symbolic power, elevating it through the "conceptual edifice imposed on it" (xxi). And yet, as Aydemir avers: "As persistent irritants, ejaculation and sperm trigger all kinds of plotting, remedial, recuperative, digressive, questioning, subversive"(xix), always already drawing attention to its materiality. He adds in this regard:

> In its oscillation between metaphoricity and literalness, conceptuality and concreteness, idealization and materialization, semen emerges as the instance where these aspects become entangled with, rather than sharply differentiated from, each other. In its elevating and sublating propensity, sperm reaches above and beyond the bodily productivity from which it originates: yet, its viscosity returns a bodily and material *gravitas* to the subject (xxi).

Insofar as Peckinpah's male images draw attention to their physicality, often collapsing in orgasmic bloodshed, they defy the effort to elevate masculinity to a cultural norm that stresses its univocal and symbolic hegemony. In fact, Aydemir claims:

> This norm privileges, idealizes and reifies some aspects of the various heterogeneous processes and energies that that body can, in principle, make available, while repressing others. Masculinity ascribes an intelligible and culturally sanctioned form to the male body, which that body can only partially support. If masculinity must claim the male body as its material and embodied vehicle, then that body can also experience itself at odds with the claim it should ideally and stably substantiate. Therefore, the male body is masculinity's most intimate and threatening "other" (XXIII).

Likewise, drawing upon Linda Williams's exploration of the money shot, Calvin Thomas has also attempted to disclose how it can momentarily disturb the boundaries of bodily containment implying thus the need "to assuage male anxiety about the lack of value, lack of power and lack of masculinity that accrue to the hyperbolic act of ejaculation at the moment of the ejaculate's self-shattering appearance" (22). Rendered visible outside the "frame of normative reproductive heterosexuality" (22), semen construed as bodily waste, dead matter must be deflected and displaced onto the woman's body. As such, it depends on "the cinematic apparatus to reproduce masculine power by other means, ensuring that semen always ends up where it belongs" (22). Recalling Chong's comparison of the money shot in pornography and the conspicuous visibility of spurts of blood in blood auteurs, I contend that the shattering of male bodies in Peckinpah's violent set-pieces is disturbingly aligned with what Thomas defines as waste, implying "lack of value, lack of power and lack of masculinity" whereby the "ejaculation" of blood - the spurts are in themselves eroticized through highly stylistic display - is in itself a loss of control, a blurring of limits, a disintegration of male subjectivity in its "phallic, hyperbolic self" (27).

The equation of violence and virility can also be traced back to the Western where the ubiquity of guns discloses an ever-recurrent discourse on the association between marksmanship, physical strength and the capacity to deploy and restrain violence. No wonder that a fatigued William Munny (Clint Eastwood) rebuffs Ned (Morgan Freeman)'s curious questions about his sexual life by saying "I don't miss it all that much". A devitalized, guilt-stricken figure of a man, William, who was cured of wickedness and drinking by his dear departed wife, defers violence to the same degree that he avoids sex. Tellingly,

Jennifer Carlson in a more sociological approach to violence and masculinity argued that men acquire guns to assert their role as protectors since they are no longer the sole bread-winners in the household and have to come to terms with a dispiriting scenario of socio-economic decline which results in the renegotiation of long-held positions of power. If power and authority can no longer be associated with provision, it is displaced onto the idea - even if imaginary and illusory - of protection. This again places men in a position of alleged dominance, whereby they assert their control over a socially beleaguered manhood. Carlson states:

> Men's struggles to (re)define hegemonic masculinity are both an expression of gendered power relations and a way to constitute those relations by laying claim to one's position at the top of the hierarchy. Hence shifts in hegemonic masculinity represent the attempts of men (even precarious men) to negotiate, and express, the power relations they inhabit vis-à-vis other men and women, which are in turn structured along race, class, and other lines of difference (2015: 389).

She also writes:

> By pivoting hegemonic masculinity on men's capacity as protectors, gun-toting men are able to lay claim to a rendition of hegemonic masculinity that allows them to negotiate a sense of socioeconomic- and, therefore, gender-precarity (405).

In the ever-insistent connection between phallic power and guns - and the expertise at using them - the question of restraint, as epitomized by Western heroes, seems to run counter to Peckinpah's expressionist squibs of blood. Chong states: "In violence, the body becomes incontinent; it is merely a body of physical laws rather than a body of agency and will" (256). And if the release of blood operates in the same way as the release of semen, the blood shot projecting the striking visibility of the money shot, breaking the bodily boundaries between inside and outside, I would argue that Peckinpah's protagonists are premature ejaculators, as they always "come" too soon in the orgasmic frenzy with which they surrender to sacrificial violence.

Sam Peckinpah's career as a director is tied up with the Western genre. Not only was this the terrain in which he made his directorial debut - with the dispiriting experience of *The*

Deadly Companions (1961) followed by the even more painful *Major Dundee*[13] - but also the one which allowed him to explore the recurrent motifs that would infuse his *oeuvre*. Whilst self-possession and control seem to be essential to the code of masculinity in the genre, in the sixties and throughout the seventies, as has already been argued, this code became difficult to sustain and appeared at odds with the social and political unrest that characterized these muddled times. However, Peckinpah appeared to be perversely and temperamentally committed to revitalizing a genre which by the late sixties was entering a *cul-de-sac*, as evidenced amongst other reasons by declining audience attendance.

David Weddle shows that Peckinpah was born within a family with strong ties to the Western landscape, a fact he was particularly fond of emphasizing, especially when he gave interviews, as this seemed to bolster the aura of toughness around his persona. In this sense, Weddle states:

> He expounded on the rigors of growing up on a cattle ranch in central California in the 1930s. He told tales of herding, roping and branding steers, of riding bucking broncos, of hunting deer and running a trap in the high sierras, of crossing streams with names like Coarse Gold where grizzled old prospectors still panned for the elusive yellow powder, of saloons in wild and woolly frontier towns like North Fork where men knocked back shots of rotgut and still drew six-guns to settle their misunderstandings (1994:14).

Peckinpah enjoyed fleshing out tall tales of his own childhood. For him, masculinity was equated with an idea of strength; he tended to suppress any signs of emotional display regarded as "feminine". As Weddle also points out, many a time Peckinpah had to conceal "signs of weakness" and quell emotional outbursts as they were perceived as "unmanly" (1994: 37). Divided between strong male figures such as his father and grandfather[14] and a domineering, manipulative mother prone to "headaches and sick spells" (17), who gave a special attention to her younger son, Peckinpah soon learned that he had to suppress his

[13] In an interview with Richard Whitehall, Peckinpah confessed that "Dundee was one of the most painful things that has ever happened in his life. Making a picture… I don't know… you become in love with it. It's part of your life" (Kayes 2008: 51-52).

[14] Stephen Prince points out: "His father was a lawyer, his maternal grandfather Denver was a district attorney and superior court judge and his brother Denny entered the law" (1998: 9).

more "feminine" side as evidenced by his fondness for reading or by his need to seclude himself in his own bedroom. He also realized that he had to endorse the masculine world represented by his father and grandfather lest he lose their approval. Moreover, Peckinpah often recalled that "family dinner talk centered on law and the Bible and that from these debates, he learned the truth was a relative thing" (Prince: 9). Interestingly, in a great many films he inquired into questions of morality, used quotes from the scripture and brought to the fore how clear-cut demarcations between right and wrong could no longer be taken for granted. It seems appropriate that *The Ox Bow Incident* (William Wellman, 1943) made such a strong impact on him during his youth[15] since the film dwells on questions of morality and vigilante action, exposing the main character (Henry Fonda)'s inner dilemma when he is called upon to judge actions based on unswerving moral standards. It is no wonder that Peckinpah also admired a film like Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) which is built on a tale of rape and murder, told from different perspectives, precluding a one-sided view of reality and suggesting the subjectivity of all human experience (Weddle 1996: 106-107).

From the very beginning of his career in television, writing scripts for TV shows like *The Rifleman* and *The Westerner*, Peckinpah revealed a keen eye and a deep-seated empathy for flawed and tainted characters who fall prey to their own wanton violent drives. While working on *The Rifleman,* Peckinpah was mostly confined to writing scripts; in *The Westerner* he was given the opportunity to direct a total of five episodes, co-writing five of the scripts (Fine: 52). The show was nevertheless cancelled after thirteen episodes had been aired, but this fact can be ascribed not so much to its treatment of "adult" themes, which were already a sign of Peckinpah's directorial imprint, but to "a much more mundane reason: low ratings" (Fine: 54). In this context, Peckinpah's short-lived experience on television was extremely important in shaping his meticulous attention to detail and technical virtuosity, preparing the ground for his cinematic career. Moreover, as Marshall Fine also argues, his association with television and with the *The Westerner* in particular

[15] David Weddle states: "Here was a western that was more than a western, that spoke to something deep and inarticulate within Sam. He drank it all in the darkness of the theatre" (1996: 47).

"put Peckinpah on the map of many people's minds" (51) as "critics, fans and friends would refer to it repeatedly as proof of his ability to take the Western genre and give it new depth and reality" (51). It should also be underlined how, at the beginning of his career, Peckinpah was indebted to Don Siegel, with whom he worked as a personal assistant on several films, learning about and absorbing avidly the directorial techniques which Siegel mastered so efficiently. This important professional and personal connection is registered by Weddle[16] and also emphasized by Leonard Engel and John M. Gourlie, who mention:

> Peckinpah first entered the film industry with Allied Artists as third assistant casting director for Don Siegel. Working well with Siegel, Peckinpah became his personal assistant on several films, including *Riot in Cell Block 11*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and *Crime in the Street*. Siegel urged him to write for television, and, following Siegel's advice, Peckinpah wrote episodes of the CBS *Gunsmoke* series, produced in 1955-56 (2003: 6).

While *The Deadly Companions* was an extremely disappointing experience for Peckinpah, where he felt for the first time how producers could hamper directors' artistic freedom, the film already featured glimpses of what would become his most recurrent tropes. Accordingly, structuring ideas of personal obsession with vengeance and the way violence can be corrosive, rather than regenerative, surface already in this "journey of self-discovery" whereby the hero's scars, literally[17] and metaphorically, are assuaged by the redemptive, "healing" woman. As Garner Simmons argues: "Despite the fact that Peckinpah himself repeatedly attempted to dismiss it as flawed beyond redemption and unrepresentative of his artistic intent, the film still bears his undeniable stamp" (Bliss 2012: 6). Producer Charles B. FitzSimons had bought the script with the intention of cashing in on his actress sister Maureen O'Hara's stardom and, therefore, as Simmons also points out: "He had taken a proprietary position with respect to *The Deadly Companions* long before Peckinpah arrived on the scene"(2012: 8). Bearing this in mind, it was difficult for someone

[16] Weddle mentions: "Siegel became Sam's teacher and guide in an exciting new landscape, prodding and enticing the younger man into extending himself to the full measure of his abilities (1994: 119). Siegel was also a mentor for Clint Eastwood.

[17] As Garner Simmons mentions, Yellowleg is one of the first scarred heroes of Peckinpah "marked by the scalping scar hidden beneath his hat as well as by a minié ball he carries from an old war wound in his right shoulder that compromises his skill with a gun"(Bliss 2012: 14) .

as perfectionist as Peckinpah to work with a producer as controlling and intrusive as FitzSimons. It is revealing that even in a narrative that foregrounds female loss, Peckinpah still prefers to dwell on the male character and his wounded subjectivity. This bears out how male loss overrides female grievance, which is given short shrift in the narrative since Kit's desperate plans are subsumed under the category of a hardly concealed hysteria. Kit's intention to carry the body through hostile landscape to the desert town of Siringo, where she requires her son be buried with his father, is perceived as excessive, signaling her emotionally unhinged state. Moreover, the film already portrays masculinity as physically debilitated: Yellowleg's poor marksmanship results from an old war wound which impairs his movements as a bullet is still lodged in his shoulder. This brings about tragic consequences since, by trying to shoot at bank robbers on the run, he is struck by pain and accidentally kills Kit's son with a stray bullet. Guilt-ridden, he accompanies Kit on her journey through Apache territory carrying the young boy's corpse which surprisingly, and against Peckinpah's angry objections[18], never betrays any signs of bodily putrefaction as happens in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*. The similarities linking both films are striking insofar as they foreground protagonists bent on revenge. The ideas of guilt and anger, together with memories of a scarred past, bind the protagonists of these films: Yellowleg's forsaking his obsessive intent hints at Peckinpah's probing the psychic dynamics of revenge (and his forced submission to production imperatives), whilst Bennie's suicidal demise relates to a later phase of Peckinpah's life and career by which time he had definitely abandoned any attempts to reach soothing resolutions. Garner Simmons writes:

> Consequently, while *The Deadly Companions* is a journey to bury a boy beside his dead father, *Alfredo Garcia* is just the reverse - a journey in which the character of Bennie, played by the exceptional Warren Oates, must exhume the head of a dead man and return it to a ruthless Mexican overlord for enough money to retire in style with the woman he loves. Where *The Deadly Companions* uses the transport of the dead boy as a metaphor for the past that both Yellowleg and Kit must put to rest, *Alfredo Garcia* would probe the dark underbelly of such an experience and the toll it takes on the human soul. In the end the burial of the boy in Siringo would be an act of liberation. But in *Alfredo Garcia*, the personal and emotional price that Bennie must pay in delivering the severed head leaves him with nowhere to go. It is no

[18] Garner Simmons points out: "Unquestionably, this lack of verisimilitude troubled Peckinpah and was a source of conflict with FitzSimons. But Peckinpah's objections were quickly dismissed" (Bliss 2012: 20).

> surprise that Peckinpah would end the later film with Bennie's death, essentially an existential choice (2012: 21).

Tellingly, in a more contemporary rendition of a related theme, in *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005) Tommy Lee Jones portrays his character's obsessive intent in taking the body of his Mexican buddy Melquiades to his native land, forcing the border patrol officer who had accidentally shot him, through a hellish journey of redemption. Peter (Tommy Lee Jones)'s character's excessive retributive reaction at his male buddy's death appears entangled in confused feelings which the film never resolves; his taking back a rotten corpse to a land which only existed as a fantasy nurtured by the Mexican's imagination bespeaks as twisted a purpose as Bennie's carrying Alfredo's head in a picnic basket throughout the narrative of Peckinpah's film.

Despite Peckinpah's bitter recollection of his directorial debut, *The Deadly Companions* articulates through Yellowleg's sullen demeanor the trajectory of his subsequent work on the theme of manhood tested. As Gérard Camy states:

> Yellowleg opens a long list of Peckinpahian heroes, pathetic strangers in a world that rejects them, desperately trying to find a reason for living. They are mentally and often physically impaired: Yellowleg and Pike Bishop are handicapped by an old wound. Amos Dundee, Mike Locken and Rolf Steiner (James Coburn, *Cross of Iron*) will be more or less injured (Bliss 2012: 168).

Moreover, the villains Turk (played by Chill Wills) and Billy (played by Steve Cochran) epitomize the colorfulness that would characterize many of Peckinpah's later"heavies". Chill Wills with his sweat-stained shirt, his frayed buffalo coat (he would reappear later in the same disheveled state as the idle, albeit loquacious, Lemuel, the brothel owner in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*) is pitted against the dandified Billy whose attention to attire evokes Boetticher's villains and the elements of garish details they always exhibit.

Robert Warshow, in his seminal essay on the Western genre (1954, argues that what the Western hero "defends at bottom is the purity of his own image - in fact, his honor" (1998:

38) adding that "The Westerner is the last gentleman, and the movies which over and over again tell his story are probably the last art form in which the concept of honor retains its strength" (38). It is within this context that violence is posited as necessary - but its deployment is always achieved through restraint. Deferral and protraction coalesce in the last display of one-upmanship whereby the hero's worth is reified. Paul Seydor observes that, though Warshow emphasizes the cleanness of violent acts in classical narratives, he culpably ignores the sadistic pleasure implicit in deploying violence. The relish in drawing a gun, although protracted, points to the stylized display of mastery and control. As Seydor writes: "When the westerner draws his gun, he does not so at all reluctantly" (Bliss 1994: 129). Bearing this in mind, he says of Peckinpah's work:

> What makes Peckinpah's violence so disturbing, ambiguous, and subversive is not that he removes the so-called countervailing values of law and order of the conventional Western or that he undercuts the excitement of violence by dwelling on its horror; rather it is that he is able to render the violence so terrifyingly, so graphically, with such raw and unflinching power, yet *still* to respond, and make us respond, fully, even exultantly, to the joy, to the passion, and exhilaration these men experience when fighting, and further, to display no misgivings about making his films embody these feelings (1994: 129).

Moreover, Richard Slotkin also offers and extensive analysis of the way the myth of the frontier legitimizes violence, endorsing its deployment as a necessary means to achieve progress. As Slotkin avers:

> What is distinctively American is not necessarily the amount or kind of violence that characterizes our history but the mythic significance we have assigned to the kinds of violence we have actually experienced, the forms of symbolic violence we imagine or invent and the political uses to which we put that symbolism (1992: 13).

In this context, violence within the ethos of the Western genre had always been validated and recognized for its regenerative power while being simultaneously linked with solipsistic, narcissistic male images. For this reason Garry Wills suggests:

> The archetypal American is a displaced person - arrived from a rejected past, breaking into a glorious future, on the move, fearless himself, feared by others, a killer but cleansing the world of things that "need killing", loved but not bound down by love, rootless but carrying the Center in himself, a gyroscopic direction-setter, a travelling norm" (…) Our basic myth is that of the frontier. Our hero is the frontiersman. To become urban is to break the spirit of man (302).

In a similar vein, Michael S. Kimmel argues that the figure of the cowboy has had a long-standing significance in the way Americans have perceived their role in history and in the images of strong masculinity they have privileged. As Kimmel states:

> Nowhere is the dynamic of American masculinity more manifest than in our singular contribution to the world's storehouse of cultural heroes: the cowboy. It was the United States that gave the world the cowboy legend, and Americans continue to see him as the embodiment of the American spirit. Even if the rest of the world finds him somewhat anachronistic, the United States has been trying to live up to the cowboy ideal ever since he appeared on the mythical historical stage (1987: 238).

Kimmel also observes how this cult of masculinity has always been predicated on excess permeating social and political areas of life with a "convulsively bellicose competitiveness" (239) which results in an obsession with effacing any suggestions of emasculation or weakness. This gives away signs of insecurity, as confirmed by Kimmel when he observes: "Interestingly enough, these common characteristics - violence, aggression, extreme competiveness, a gnawing insecurity - are also the defining features of compulsive masculinity, a masculinity that must always prove itself and that is always in doubt" (237). This brings to mind films like *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) or *Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004) which foreground, through the doppelganger trope, the male desire to discard the inheritance of New Man-trappings and its attendant emasculation expressing a yearning to regress to an omnipotent, fantasy-like masculinity which does away with the accoutrements of a consumerist, sissified (as in *Fight Club*) or working class (as in *Collateral*) disempowerment. In this process, violence plays a disturbing central role. Susanne Kord and Elizabeth Krimmer argue that contemporary images of masculinity are beset by insecurity and battle with the need to reassert its authority by renegotiating the tenets of a post-feminist inheritance. This has led to the recognition that "manhood is under siege but it is equally true that crisis is correlated with catharsis" (2011: 2). In this line of thought,

they argue that despite being perceived as no longer unassailable or inviolable, masculinity continues to reify its power through a process of repetition, as shown by the marketability of the action sequel. They state:

> The absence of setbacks and defeats is not what differentiates winners from losers. Rather the ability to transcend victimization provides the yardstick by which films measure their heroes. The vast majority of recent cinematic hits derive their power from the revitalization of a threatened or temporarily destabilized masculinity. But these triumphs are often short-lived. Their tenuous nature is evident not only in the considerable irony with which some of these films treat their excessively capable heroes, but also in the preference for sequels in which the hero must prove his masculinity over and over again. Through the repetition compulsion of the ever triumphant sequel hero, these films relay the moment of crisis and substitute provisional victories for permanent solutions (2).

American cinema has attempted to reconcile the image of the Retributive man with a softer New Man (Rutherford: 28), recognizing and accommodating the changes brought about by feminism. This has mainly been achieved by borrowing traits that had been hitherto associated with women and thus projecting an image of a more liberal-minded masculinity. In this sense, as Kord and Krimmer observe:

> The conflicting demands imposed on the new hero call for a skilled negotiation of the interface of masculinity and violence. In film after film violence emerges as the crux of masculinity. How can men be both violent and loving, both sociable and competitive? (4).

Peckinpah's endorsement of Robert Ardrey's *oeuvre,*[19]which claimed that violence stemmed from primeval instincts, displaying the human propensity for aggressive self-defense and territorial demarcation, was oftentimes summoned to justify the former's capitalizing on retributive violence, especially in the wake of controversial films like *The*

[19] Prince states: "Robert Ardrey was a distinctive figure on the 1960s popular cultural landscape because of a trio of books he penned that argue that much human behavior is based on instinctual responses that are of fundamental animal origin. *African Genesis* (1961), *The Territorial Imperative* (1966) and *Social Contract* (1970) stress the primitive components of human identity and behavior" (105). Martin Barker also underlines how Ardrey had some impact on Kubrick as well: "Kubrick was a considerable fan of the crudely , speculative ideas of Robert Ardrey, whose 1966 book, *The Territorial Imperative*, theorized "aggression" in proto-sociobiological terms" (Schneider 2004: 64).

Wild Bunch or *Straw Dogs*. This position, according to Prince, gave Peckinpah the "attractive mantle of scholarly repute in which he could cloak his polemics on human violence" (106).

Accordingly, Peckinpah's vision was always fraught with contradictions perceptible in his fascination with an image of a violent, retributive masculinity that could be traced back to the Western and by the internal strains that these images had always shored up. As time went by and his own physical decline took its toll on his directorial control, his approach to violence begins to rely on an induced-reflex strategy, which he realized was no more than box office-grossing gimmicks rather than a self-conscious effort to prod spectators' minds into reflection. Peckinpah's protagonists reflect the disempowerment and the disenchantment which his own career and personal life evinced. In their demise, they bear out how masculinity appears divested of symbolic power and in this sense, as this thesis will set out to prove, the melancholia which suffuses his films is more a sign of defeat than one sign of glamorization. In the following discussion I will focus on three films which crystallise Peckinpah's views on masculinity. I will focus on *Major Dundee* first since, despite its inconsistent structure, it shows how Peckinpah tries to re-empower his main character after having exposed his weakness. Then I turn to *Ride the High Country* and finally address *The Wild Bunch* in that both touch upon questions of anachronism, ageing and physical inadequacy. These three films offer rich material to show that, for Peckinpah's male protagonists, access to the symbolic structures of power is always hindered by their own short-comings and misconceptions of the reality that surrounds them. In this world, holding a gun is not evidence of a glamorized mystique *à la Shane*. It is rather compensation for a dearth of physical - and moral - wholeness. The "teensy little pecker" which made Delilah (Anna Levine) laugh in *Unforgiven* resonates through many old and new narratives on masculinity.

i- Masculinity in *Major Dundee*: between dandyism and *dundeeism*

"You haven't got the temperament to be a liberator, Amos."
Major Tyreen (Richard Harris) in *Major Dundee* (1965)

The memory of making *Major Dundee* churned around in Sam Peckinpah's mind for years, leaving him with a bitter sense of frustration. His struggle against Columbia producer Jerry Bresler came to acquire epic dimensions and Peckinpah's belligerent personality found in that conflict a means to vent much of his hatred of the Hollywood studio brass. The location shooting in Mexico was also a hard and energy-sapping experience for both actors and supporting crew and Peckinpah there exposed some of his more unpalatable personality traits.

After the critical success of *Ride the High Country*, Peckinpah was deemed the ideal director to tackle the thirty-seven-page script by Harry Julian Fink (who would later write *Dirty Harry*). Peckinpah was immediately enthusiastic about the project as he saw in Dundee's obsessive pursuit of the Apache Sierra Charriba an ideal framework for exploring questions of power and narcissism akin to General Custer's self-aggrandizing dreams.[20] As Weddle states:

> A story about a renegade cavalry officer charging into the middle of a Mexican revolution triggered his adrenaline. He saw here another chance to tackle the Custer character. In Sam's hands Dundee would become a man who, like Custer, changed the course of history and went down in text books as a hero. But in reality the major would be driven not by a sense of justice or ideals, but by his own ruthless ambition and corrosive demons. Sam understood that kind of man too well (1994: 230).

Peckinpah's film and the military context in which it is framed brings to mind Ford's cavalry Westerns, and yet while in Ford's trilogy issues of honor and integrity are never questioned - except perhaps in *Fort Apache* (1948) - Peckinpah offers an image of manhood which is problematized right from the outset. Many a time Ford foregrounds the military's sense of duty as a civilizing force when the strengthening of community ties - in which women play

[20] As has already been argued, Custer would also be object of deconstruction in Penn's *Little Big Man* where he is cast as a narcissistic man who is ready to sacrifice his troops to feed his delusional dreams of grandeur.

a pivotal role – is desperately needed. *Rio Grande,* as Kitses suggests (2004: 89), puts the emphasis on the healing of a marriage and, in this process, the military life style is reinforced through the eyes of a reluctant female character who comes round to admiring the strength and devotion of soldiers. In Ford's world women's acceptance of men's actions, their approving gaze, is an important part in the validation of military rhetoric. Similarly, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) enforces the idea of communal values inherent in the cavalry background, the allegiance to a common moral core that bolsters the sense of national identity, often pitched against Indian savagery, the alienated Other. Even *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960) posits the military world as an inclusive, all-encompassing place which accommodates differences and negotiates conflicts, an example of cohesion irrespective of the strains and tensions that often surface in the narrative.

Despite the convoluted path that led to the mangling of the film, *Major Dundee* still offers an interesting example of how Peckinpah's work is so deeply engaged with representations of masculinity. The military is the obvious domain to reflect on issues which are obsessively present in Peckinpah's *oeuvre*: the idea of male bonding and the idea of betrayal. This is developed through the opposition between the two main figures: Major Amos Dundee (Charlton Heston) and Captain Tyreen (Richard Harris). When the film opens with the voiceover narrative of young bugler Timothy Ryan (Michael Anderson Jr), we are introduced to the devastating actions of the Apache Sierra Charriba (Michael Pate), who has been responsible for raiding and destroying the Rostes' ranch. Ryan is the sole survivor who registers the unravelling of events in his diary, offering at the same time his own perceptions of the world around him. Being the only witness to "this tragedy", he holds the "only existing record" of what happened. Ryan is young as borne out by the moment he has his first sexual experience, emphasized by the soldiers' jesting about his first shave. The narrative soon belies this subjective view by presenting a multiplicity of details which could never have been apprehended by Ryan.

The opening images foreground Sierra Charriba and his defiant question: "Who will they send against me now?" His image is framed in a higher spatial position to emphasize a

privileged point of view. His question is followed visually by Dundee and his band of soldiers approaching on their horses. Dundee, a cigar in his mouth, projects military authority and confidence: "if I signal you to come you come, if I signal you to run, you run and follow me like hell otherwise hold your position", are his first words of command. Throughout the narrative, Dundee is often positioned in higher levels, overlooking others or from a distance, his figure silhouetted against the landscape highlighting, through spatial separation, his lack of connection with others and his need to assert a superior hierarchical position. This posturing will render his subsequent downfall more visually poignant, as the privileged position of holding the gaze over others will be offset by his decline, visually emphasised by a demeaning prone position.

The Western also subjects the male body to extremes of endurance and physical pain, oftentimes to see it recovering and convalescing, or to use Mitchell's words, making sure it is "whipped into shape"(1996: 175). This brings to mind Brando's brutal beating in *One Eyed Jacks* (Marlon Brando, 1961) and his ensuing rehabilitation or even William Munny in *Unforgiven* who is nursed back into life by a woman as scarred as he is. Mitchell's words are apposite in this view:

> From this perspective, it is clear that Western heroes are knocked down, made supine, then variously tortured simply so that they can recover in order to rise again. Or rather, the process of beating occurs so that we can see men recover, regaining their strength and resources in the process of once again making themselves into men. The paradox lies in the fact that we watch them become what they really are, as we exult in the culturally encoded confirmation of a man again becoming a biological man (174).

Dundee's initial intention of chasing Charriba is given the honorable rationale of retrieving the captive children abducted by the Apache. Evoking the many captivity narratives which frame the myth of the frontier, his quest is thus validated by the attempt to reestablish order and by the fears instilled by the "savage" Other. Slotkin states: "The captive symbolizes the values of Christianity and civilization that are imperiled in the wilderness war" (14). To achieve his goals Dundee will enlist the bunch of renegade Confederate soldiers who are imprisoned in Fort Benlin. His direct opponent is Captain Tyreen, an ex-West Point friend, cashiered out of the regiment by a disciplinary tribunal - since Tyreen

had killed a man in a duel of honor - in which Dundee cast the deciding vote for his friend's expulsion. The two men hold grudges against each other since Dundee, a southerner by origin, has been fighting for the North and Tyreen, an "Irish potato farmer", has fought for the South out of loyalty to friends. "You were fighting for promotion, you were trying to please the officers in Washington", Tyreen lashes out in anger and resentment. From the characters' mutual accusations we perceive Dundee feels he has been demoted to the function of "jailer", his military skills misprised by keeping guard over a group of renegade soldiers. His feelings about a position he construes as demeaning call to mind Colonel Thursday (Henry Fonda) in *Fort Apache*: both absorbed by a desire to get promoted, they totally misconstrue the otherness of different cultures.

The film is multifaceted in presenting a metaphor for deep-seated divisions that deny Ford's vision of communal ties in his military narratives. In an aborted attempt to escape from the fort, Tyreen and his closest companions will be forced to follow Dundee into Mexico, retrieving the abducted children and destroying the Apache. Dundee exercises an authoritarian power by forcing their acceptance under threat of their being hanged. A chained but adamant Tyreen defies Dundee's demand he volunteer to pursue the Apache in Mexican territory by claiming: "It is not my country and I damn its flag and I damn you and I'd rather hang than serve". Suffice it to say, he will be forced to serve along with his men but this angry reaction and his open-arms posture concurs with the character's dramatic exuberance. Pledging that he will obey until "the Apache is taken or destroyed" Tyreen is bound by his word which Dundee takes as a sign of allegiance, even if it is only temporary.

Thus, Dundee's army becomes a mixed group, an assortment of individuals driven by different goals, a kind of wild bunch in the guise of a "crazy quilt company" (Kitses 2004: 214) of confederate renegades, "cowboys, drifters and drunks". Thus we have West Point-trained Lieutenant Graham (Jim Hutton), always eager to carry out orders even when it implies circumventing the law (as when he gets the ammunition needed for Dundee's odyssey) but whose comic stiffness is constantly belied by the casual disorganized irreverence of others; Slim Pickens's Wiley who is there for the free whiskey - his

memorable "you wanted an Injun-fighting, mule-packing, whiskey-drinking volunteer?", R.G Armstrong's preacher Dahlstrom, reincarnating the bible-thumping character in *Ride the High Country* and his "mighty is the arm of the lord"- battle-cry and Aesop (Brock Peters) with his six "coloreds", who attempt to escape from the drudgery of standing guard and cleaning stables. Tyreen is followed by his confederate squad who pay allegiance to him and to the South: Sergeant Chillum (Ben Johnson), Arthur Hadley (L.Q. Jones), O.W. Hadley (Warren Oates), Jimmy Lee Benteen, (John Davis Chandler) and Priam (Dub Taylor). The internal divisions of this multifaceted group could not be more suggestively expressed than in the scene when leaving the fort the confederates start singing "Dixie", the "bluebellies" (as sergeant Chillum calls them) strike up with "The "Battle Hymn of the Republic", and the misfit reprobates go in for "My Darling Clementine". This medley highlights the rifts dividing this group of men, reanimating the larger conflict of the civil war. And yet, despite this, it seems that the film steers away from tackling the war issue and questions of national identity but rather centers on exploring the relationship between Dundee and Tyreen, laying stress on their differences, whittled down to personal questions of male bonding and identity insecurity. When there is a moment in the narrative where racism and national divisiveness erupt through Jimmy Lee Benteen's southern jibes at Aesop - "you've forgotten your manners, nigger"- when he demands he take off his boots, the issue is dealt with forthrightly by preacher Dahlstrom's bout of violent justice, and the internal splits in the group are displaced onto the common goal of destroying a common enemy: the Apache. In this sense, Paul Seydor writes:

> What really makes the film at best an aborted metaphor for the civil war, however, is the character of Dundee himself, whose private obsession is wholly inadequate to the task of representing and thus focusing on the national problems of identity that could be said to have led up to the civil war: the social issue of slavery, the political issue of a quasi-feudal collection of states occupying the same boundaries as a more democratic collection of states, and the economic issue of an agrarian society versus a mercantile-industrial society. Indeed Dundee's problems as soldier, as leader of men, and as a man are already unrelated to the country's problems as a confederation of states (1997: 77).

Kitses goes on to argue:

> At the fort, we enjoy a comfortable relationship with the familiar situation of an ambitious officer with a shady past and the prospect of the pursuit of Indians who have taken hostages. The crisp pace here, together with Charlton Heston's authoritative Dundee, naturally arouses expectations in us of action that will have purpose and direction. However once again away from the fort, all this is gradually but totally undercut by a series of dislocations so disturbing that that they have the effect, finally, of giving *Major Dundee* the air of a bitterly artful parody of the traditional cavalry picture (2004: 214).

While Dundee represents an inflexible military code, Tyreen is amenable to adjusting to different situations and contexts and ultimately the one who sacrifices himself in a suicidal romantic gesture perfectly attuned to the dandy-like, chivalric posture he had adopted throughout. The question of identity is central to the narrative and so the characters spend time trying to describe each, often in derogatory terms. If Dundee upbraids Tyreen: "You're a would-be cavalier, an Irish potato farmer with a plumed hat fighting for a white columned plantation house you never had and never will", Tyreen rebuts: "Have you ever stopped to think why they made you a jailer instead of a soldier?". Despite Tyreen's divided psyche and his recognition that he has been three men, "Irish immigrant, cashiered American officer and confederate renegade", he seems to hold on to a code of honor which keeps his identity intact, whereas Dundee falls apart, laying bare his existential doubts precisely because he must fall short of the ideal he has concocted for himself: "Don't you have any doubts about who you are?", he asks Tyreen while the former attempts to rescue him from his self-annihilation and his drunken self-destructiveness in the squalid streets of Durango.

Tyreen's plumed hat, his flamboyance and linguistic aplomb are pitched against Dundee's crispness, his taciturnity and his slightly deranged fixations. The way they approach Teresa Santiago, the Austrian doctor's widow from the Mexican village where they find some respite (presaging *The Wild Bunch's* solace in Angel's village), underscores their substantial differences: while Dundee assumes his military role, asking her questions related with the villagers' situation, Tyreen flirts: "With a beauty such as yours this village is rich without comparison". At the *fiesta* (again *The Wild Bunch* comes to mind) Tyreen asks Teresa to dance "as if he was in ballroom in Vienna". When Dundee cuts in he looks stiff and

awkward, like Earp in *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford, 1946) unfamiliar with the games of seduction, soon being interrupted by a drunk Graham who takes over and substitutes him in Teresa's dancing embrace. These differences are also perceived by the way both characters relate to different cultures: if Tyreen speaks in Spanish to the villagers, showing his tractability and his capacity to adapt culturally, Dundee clings to his stiff military bearing, even his gesture of generosity when he demands two mules be killed to feed the starving villagers stems more from a *Magnificent Seven*-like-condescension, and its attending sense of cultural superiority, rather than from genuine concern. This can be discovered from his interactions with Samuel Potts (James Coburn), when Dundee misconstrues the Apache and underestimates their gumption and skills as warriors, much in the same vein as Owen Thursday does in *Fort Apache*. When he ask Potts whether the man who accompanies him is Riago - the Apache scout- the former replies sarcastically: "Do they all look the same to you?" Likewise, when he shows his misgivings about Riago saying that he does not believe the Apache might turn against their own people, Potts crisply argues "Why not? Everyone else seems to be doing it!" a remark which projects Peckinpah's personal fixation with the issue of loyalty and betrayal. As Seydor argues, Potts is a key character in the narrative:

> A detached participant, Potts functions as observer and commentator on the events. It would probably be too much to call him the group conscience (he's more like the resident cynic), but Peckinpah does use him from time to time as a mouthpiece to qualify, clarify or otherwise place into deeper or enlarged perspective the various moral pretentions of others (1997: 85).

Thus, Potts's belief in Riago and his often critical remarks on Dundee's racist misconstructions reaffirm his ability to understand cultural differences, like McIntosh, the character played by Burt Lancaster in Robert Aldrich *Ulzana's Raid* (1972). He is "the man who knows Indians" (Slotkins: 47), in a long-held tradition that goes back to Cooper's Hawkeye, the one who is capable of understanding and respecting the otherness of an alien culture. Interestingly, when Riago is harshly berated by Dundee, who is angry at his inability to predict Charriba's reactions, "Just what the hell is he?" the latter answers bitterly "I am a tamed Apache, a camp dog. Charriba is Apache", hinting at the way his absorption into

white culture has impaired his cunning[21]. Dundee's obduracy will be thrown into sharp relief by the way he is responsible for the massacre at the river where the troops are waylaid and ambushed by Sierra Charriba and his men, causing many casualties. If he is akin to Ethan in *The Searchers* inasmuch as they are both driven by an obsessive quest, he is shorn of the former's tactical vision and cognizance of the Indian world[22]. Even when the children are rescued, Dundee keeps on pursuing Charriba, which reinforces the idea that he is driven by a thirst for domination rather than by any attempt to reestablish order. In fact, the Apache remain an ever-elusive presence which bears out the way they are ungraspable to Dundee. "How can we catch the wind or destroy an animal we never see?" asks Ryan at a certain point in the narrative. This representation of the Apache brings to mind the way they are also portrayed in *The Deadly Companions*: a threatening but elusive presence as epitomized by the lone Apache that chases Kit and Yellowleg on their way to Siringo, even indulging in games of hide and seek. His sudden appearance in the cave where Kit hides is startling and unexpected and his scraggy facial features emphasize his warrior qualities and resilience. However, in Peckinpah's world, native Indians are largely as peripheral and insubstantial as women, just serving as a counterpoint to white, heterosexual manhood - an otherness that is also defiant.

The moment when Dundee sentences O.W.Hadley to execution for his desertion constitutes a watershed in the development of events. If the group was gathering strength and revitalized near the river - water can be an important symbol of regeneration in Peckinpah's films - the disruption caused by Hadley's attempt to flee and Dundee's unflinching condemnation will instil a climate of disbelief and sever the already loose bonds which had to this point kept these men together. Hadley's plea for mercy is a crucial moment where Tyreen and Dundee's differences are made plain. Dundee sticks to the rigour of a dehumanized code whereas Tyreen holds on to his word and sense of honor: "You should have remembered you belong to the major and not to me!" he answers

[21] Similarly in Clint Eastwood's *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976), Lone Watie, (played by Chief Dan George) also remarks that he belongs to one of the civilized tribes, therefore he has lost his ability to sneak upon the white men, hinting at the way the "civilizing" process deprived him of his warrior skills.

[22] One only has to recall the memorable exchange between Ethan and Chief Scar: "You speak good English, did anyone teach you?" asks the former, to which Scar retorts:" You speak good Comanche, did anyone teach you?"

Hadley, when the latter calls for mercy invoking his allegiance and obeisance to the captain. To avoid Hadley's being executed by a makeshift firing squad of northern soldiers, Tyreen acting in "a Lawrence of Arabia" style (Fulwood 2002: 36), shoots him himself. The revulsion he feels is translated into his weary, heavy-shouldered posture, standing on a slant and taking off the feather in his plumed hat, an indication that something has been irredeemably lost, about himself and about his responsibility for the men under his protection. When Dundee, in a sexual encounter with Teresa suggested by their swimming in the river and by a post-coital moment of release, is caught unawares and shot with an Indian arrow in his right leg, Tyreen chides him harshly: "You were trapped at the river, ambushed like a shovetail, you caused a boy's death and you've split your command… what are you doing Major? Easing your conscience in the arms of a woman?" Dundee's wounding constitutes a turning point in the narrative, paving the way for his downfall and his self-appointed exile in Durango. The transition into the Durango sequence and Dundee's emotional collapse was marred by the studio's cut in such a way that Dundee's roaming the seedy streets, his wallowing in self-loathing and his finding comfort in the arms of a prostitute do not seem to accord with his supposedly temporary convalescence. Despite these ill-fitting pieces, Dundee's psychological crumbling points to the identity issues which seem to lie at the heart of the character's contradiction and his short-comings as a soldier and as a man.

9. Dundee in Durango, the master turned abject.

Recalling Kirkham and Thumim's reasoning Dundee's trajectory is one which bears out his denied access to power, expressed by the fragility of his self-constructed manhood. The huge gap between what he wants to project and achieve and his subsequent moral diminishment bring into focus the way the breakdown of male assurance is inflected through and inscribed in bodily deterioration. When Tyreen comes to his rescue, roles are reversed and male bonding seems to heal the rifts from the past and the grudges which had come between them: "Until the Apache is taken or destroyed" becomes an aborted promise of vindictive action, forever in suspension. Bliss says about this moment:

> Very soon now, with Dundee in Durango and Tyreen coming to rescue him, jailer and jailed will have switched roles, with the notable difference that whereas earlier, in the fort's prison, Tyreen was triumphant although literally in chains, Dundee in Durango is in defeat and is constrained by his own personal weaknesses (1993: 72).

Dundee's regaining of his command, the killing of Charriba by young Ryan and Tyreen's final assault on the French troops, with the romantic flair he had always epitomized, seem

too contrived a denouement to be credible. Nothing in the last narrative sequences seems to hold together strongly, the loose bits remain adrift, and yet the film is still a compelling study of manhood and a test run for many themes which would be developed with more coherence in *The Wild Bunch*. The polarized relationship between Tyreen and Dundee presage Pike and Thornton's embittered differences or Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid's painful estrangement. In this sense, Kitses is right when he states:

> It is clear that the released version is a severely damaged work that Peckinpah could only look back on with pain and misgivings. However for all this, in my view the power and meaning are still there, the structure and imagery clear, the deeply personal statement of the film undeniable (2004: 212).

Despite its mangled narrative, *Major Dundee* illustrates through its "incoherent text"- to recall Wood's words - how Peckinpah still held on to a concept of honor which would be later undermined by more skeptical and nihilist characters. Dundee's rising from "the dead", holding aloft an authority which had been questioned, bespeaks the need to tie up the fragments of masculine disintegration, the flotsam and jetsam of a masculine body which had collapsed and convalesced through the healing power of male bonding (always imperiled by external forces) and sacrificial violence. His degradation in Durango hints at how closely abjection threatened the integrity of his phallic authority by making the body frail and vulnerable, surrendered to an alcoholic stupor. Recalling Calvin Thomas's reasoning, Dundee's fall and his subsequent recovery speaks to "an anxious masculine relationship to the male body, to the visibility of that body, the traverse of its boundaries, the representability of its products, the corporeal dimension of male subjectivity and the unavoidable materiality of the signifying process itself" (15). It is no wonder then that it is Tyreen, the dandified male who must die. Recalling Martin Pumphrey's arguments, in the Western scenario, calling attention to oneself through "non-functional aspects of dress" (1989: 86) entails physical display which runs counter to the dynamics of power the genre ascribes to looking. Tellingly, Pumphrey states:

> Looking, the hero's life suggests, is not a matter of pleasure but wholly of power and dominance. Looking at other men can only be legitimated in terms of defense or attack, looking at women is to invite disruption or worse. The Western hero's

> example condemns both non-functional self-display and the pleasuring play of the vagrant eye. (88-89).

Much later, Richard Harris would return again as English Bob in Eastwood's *Unforgiven*, attracting everyone's attention through his elaborate speeches extolling social class, recalling through his again dandified bearing, Tyreen's exuberant verbal and sartorial style. Suffice it to say, his panache is crushed by Little Bill's direct and debunking masculinity. The dandy is too ambiguous a figure to be accommodated - unproblematically - within the strongly virile world that the Western evokes. Significantly, the casting of Charlton Heston also recalls associations with his other roles, outside the premises of the Western, mainly in epics like *Ben Hur* (William Wyler, 1959), *El Cid* (Anthony Mann, 1961) or his role as John the Baptist in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (George Stevens, 1965) where his body is subjected to physical aggression only to emerge triumphant at the end in an inviolable image of maleness. His Dundee-like General Gordon in *Khartoum* (Basil Dearden, 1966) is another example of how his persona is so much entwined with these images of dignified, "honourable" manhood. However, in *Major Dundee*, despite the eventual reprisal of restraint and control, masculinity is jolted from a position of dominance and we witness, even if only in a short phase, its disturbing collapse.

ii- *Ride the High Country:* refashioning the old code of the West

"You were watching me. I like a man who watches things going on around.
Means he will make his mark someday."
Shane (Alan Ladd) talking to Joey (Brandon De Wilde) in George Stevens's *Shane* (1953)

Shane's words to the wide-eyed Joey hint at the way phallic power is equated with control over looking and observing. Accordingly, masculine self-possession hinges on the power to control the gaze whether this control takes the form of restraint or the overriding power to predict and anticipate the enemy's actions. Interestingly, over and over again Peckinpah's heroes fail to see. Their grasp of reality is constantly foreshortened either by their own miscalculations (as in *Major Dundee*) or by their own age-inflicted shortsightedness. I will argue that his work's indictment of power structures can function as a metaphorical projection of the studios' relentless interference in his work, and it can also be the expression of his disillusioned view of American's burgeoning subordination to ruthless capitalism. Despite its underlying tone of disenchantment, *Ride the High Country* can be construed as Peckinpah's most committed attempt to recuperate the framework in which violence is embedded in a code of honor and is thus regenerative, to use Slotkin's words. In this sense, *Ride the High Country* bears the promise of redemption and hope which is emptied out of *The Wild Bunch* and which in *Major Dundee* is left unresolved. The film is transitional between Peckinpah's belief in this code and his later jaundiced view of human existence.

In an interesting analysis of both *Ride the High Country* and *The Wild Bunch*, Armando José Prats argues that Peckinpah's heroes always ride into a post-mythic, post-heroic scenario where the ideals of law and order, the promise and the belief in societal bonds which classic Westerns had heralded, have been replaced by rapacity and greed. The ending of *Shane* or *The Searchers* where the heroes ride away on their own, leaving behind a purged community to reorganize itself into a promising future, is in Peckinpah's films subverted to showcase an inverted path. Riding back into this new order they come up against a

dispiriting world, bereft of the mythic promises that the past had consecrated. In this line, Prats observes:

> The threat to the Peckinpah hero is accordingly *this new order itself*: though he rides into such a world at the beginning of the action, the Peckinpah hero is no more *of* it than the hero of the classic Western hero is as he rides out of it (2003: 20).

He elaborates on this:

> Thus, "revision" in the Peckinpah Western means not so much a reinvention of the genre - a genre reinvented is "only" a genre reenvisioned, and thus reaffirmed - but the recasting of the hero's redemptive deed in relation to an epoch that claims (unlike that of the classic Western) to have no need for heroes. Peckinpah postmythic appears before us not as a perversion of Edenic hope but as *the full measure and utter fulfillment of that hope*. It is not so much an America that has perverted its ideals as an America corrupted by the *realization of its own ideals.* Peckinpah's postmythic America is not - like that of the classic Western - a besieged America awaiting hopefully the fulfillment of those ideals through a heroic deliverance from alien evils, but an America whose banality and venality themselves fulfil squalid dreams (20).

This view articulates the pessimistic tone of Peckinpah's films, which endow his heroes, amidst the desolation of this post-heroic landscape, with a humanity and authenticity that are pitted against the engulfing social forces symbolized by what old Sykes would call "they" in *The Wild Bunch*: "They! Who the hell is they?" he sardonically asks. This anonymous, faceless "they" will reappear in many guises in Peckinpah's films, from the clerk-like Samson bankers in *Ride the High Country* to Harrigan, the corrupt railway man who takes the law into his own hands in *The Wild Bunch*, or the Comteg secret agency in *The Killer Elite* or even El Jefe's minions in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*. They impose the sense of entrapment and social exclusion which condemns Peckinpah's protagonists to oblivion, even when they try to survive in these newly refashioned historical times.

In *High Country* Peckinpah cast two old stars associated with the Western genre, Joel McCrea and Randolph Scott, whose presence gave a backward-glancing mood to the film. Paul Seydor points out:

> Steve Judd and Gil Westrum are the first of Peckinpah's aging Westerners to have survived the days that formed them and gave them their values. The presence of McCrea and Scott, by this time, western film stars in the autumn of their careers, could not help but confer an extra measure of pathos on the roles they played (1997: 46).

Like other films in Peckinpah's career, *Ride the High Country* traces the difficulties of sustaining commitment to male camaraderie and friendship when materialistic values are brought to the fore. Steve Judd (Joel McCrea), once a lawman, signs a contract to transport deposits of gold from the nearby mining town of Coarse Gold. The job is considered dangerous as those who had made the trip before had been robbed and killed. After riding into town, Steve meets his old friend and ex deputy Gil Westrum (Randolph Scott) who runs a fairground stall where he impersonates "The Oregon Kid"- and he is so far from being a kid! - billed as the "The frontier man who tamed Dodge City". Wearing a wig and a fake beard, Westrum looks like a cartoonish, parodic figure, cashing in on the frontier past. Moreover, Gil's impersonation of the Oregon Kid also reinforces the idea that the myth of the frontier was predicated on fraudulent tall tales of male indomitability, recalling Robert Altman's *Buffallo Bill and the Indians* (1976) and the way these hegemonic ideas are debunked through Buffalo Bill (Paul Newman)'s facetious appropriation of history ("everything historical is mine", he says) and his show business approach to fantasies of white male invincibility. It becomes clear that both men are well past their prime and that they have become obsolete figures in a socially refashioned context where automobiles are replacing horses and their physical decline and squalid material resources are clearly thrown into relief. These gray-haired men appear outdated and worn out, with their frayed cuffs and hole-riddled boots, and yet, when pitted against the venality of the town's citizens, who indulge in senseless amusements like rigged camel races, they come off as more noble and dignified, for they epitomize an image of masculinity which has not altogether lost its association with the old West, the high country of the title.

Peckinpah suggests this sense of displacement from the outset, when Steve is seen riding into town and, flanked by a cheering crowd, he taps the brim of his hat unwittingly thinking that the welcome reception is for him. Only when he is harshly berated by a police man

"Get out of the way, old man, can't you hear, can't you see you're in the way?" does he realize that he is blocking the race track. The words of admonishment of the policeman project his dislodgement and anachronism. Apart from this moment, when the character comes up against the reality of his own irrelevance, the bank scene is also redolent of Steve's age-related debility and obsolescence. As he enters the building, the bank employee remarks immediately that he was expecting "someone younger "and when Steve is given the contract to read he says he needs to read it in privacy and locks himself in the toilet where he puts on his reading glasses.

10. Old timers, Steve Judd (Joel McCrea) and Gil Westrum (Randolph Scott), wearing their longjohns, reminiscing about the past, brooding over the present.

After their meeting, Steve suggests his old friend accompany him on this mission and together with the latter's brawling, womanizing sidekick, Heck Longtree (Ron Starr), they head off to Coarse Gold. Unbeknownst to Steve, Westrum and Heck plan to steal the gold, with Westrum all the time trying to undermine Steve's steady sense of morality. When reminiscing, Westrum often exposes how their years of devotion and dedication have amounted to nothing but deprivation and a meagre existence, thus attempting to justify his devious scheme. Steve's sense of decency, his own moral dictum - the need to enter his house justified[23] - offers stern resistance to his friend; he is thus unremitting in carrying out his mission. Between the high mountains and the town, they find lodgings at Knudsen (R.G. Armstrong)'s place, a bible-obsessed homesteader whose self-righteous speech suggests a religious fanaticism[24] which stifles the existence of his only daughter, Elsa (Mariette Hartley).

The dinner table and the exchange of biblical quotes, with Steve showing himself to be as bible cognizant as Knudsen, while Westrum taunts both with mocking wisecracks, seem to echo Peckinpah's own memories of his youth, as described by his biographer David Weddle. As they ride off to Coarse Gold they find out that Elsa, escaping from her father's tyranny, has tagged along to rendezvous with her fiancé, a miner who had promised to marry her. The sequences in Coarse Gold are striking in their gaudy liveliness. When asked by Ernest Callenbach why he infused the mining camp with a garish vitality "which becomes practically surrealistic" (Hayes 2008: 9), Peckinpah underlined how he wanted to show the scene from Elsa's frightened perspective:

> Well a lot had to do with the girl who was playing Elsa and I mainly wanted to show the difference between her life with her father on a remote ranch, as compared to the vitality of these towns, which I know so well myself. I also know the brothers -

[23] According to David Weddle, that line was inspired by a biblical verse which Peckinpah's father used to quote. As he mentions: "That line…was paraphrasing a biblical verse I learned from my father" Sam later said. "He was a great student of the bible and this is one of the things I remember from my childhood" (1994: 202).
[24] This same bible-quoting figure reappears as Reverend Dahlstrom in *Major Dundee* and Deputy Bob in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*.

> like they were my own. Those people do exist. I think they are as true to life as anybody in the picture (Hayes: 9).

The outlandish procession where Elsa rides astride a horse, wearing her mother's wedding dress, her expression of deep disappointment as she realizes the ceremony will take place in a saloon/brothel - with the brazen Kate and her employees acting as maids of honor - throws into sharp focus Elsa's fears and insecurities. This was not the scenario she had envisaged. Surprisingly, in the midst of this debauchery, the drunken Judge Tolland (Edgar Buchanan) observes about marriage: "A good marriage is like a rare animal, it's difficult to find, it's almost impossible to keep. The glory of a good marriage doesn't come at the beginning but comes later on. It's hard work". Coming from an irremediable drunk, this is as touching a discourse as it is unexpected, bursting the confines of the film narrative and reminding us of Peckinpah's own troubled experience with marriage. The same happens with the lecherous, rambunctious Hammond brothers who are intent on "sharing" the bride among themselves. Acting as a closely-knit group, their masculine bonding, family loyalty and raucous behavior project a colorful vitality which hints at Peckinpah's fondness for gangs of outcasts. They also recall other all-male families like the Clantons in Ford's *My Darling Clementine* or the Cleggs in Ford's *Wagon Master* (1950). Peckinpah delights in portraying these outcasts by assigning considerable amount of narrative time to their quirky behavior like the scene of Oates being forced to take a bath by his brothers. Their sexually predatory behavior is underlined by their failed attempt to gang rape Elsa, who is saved in the nick of time by the old timers, who here, more than anywhere else, represent the gentleman-like qualities emphasized by Warshow.

When Steve eventually realizes that Gil intends to rob him, he feels this as a terrible act of treachery. As Gil reasons with Steve, trying to find an excuse for his double-crossing and deception "this is bank money, not yours", Steve angrily replies "and what they don't know won't hurt them. Not them, only me". These words express Steve's integrity and his own personal motto that entering your "house justified" implies keeping your word irrespective of whom you have given it to. Whilst showing the intention to hand both Heck and Gil over to the law, they eventually reunite to defeat the vengeful Hammond brothers. This fact will

redeem Westrum, as he will eventually come round to accepting Steve's moral duty. In this sense, the final shootout with the Hammond brothers at Knudsen's farm, in which Steve is mortally wounded, acquires a significance which comments on the oppositional stances embodied by both characters. Suffice it to say, Gil will adopt Steve's moral position as he says: "Don't worry about anything, I'll take care of it just like you would have" to which Steve answers in his dying throes "Hell I know that, you just forgot it for a while. So long partner!" The poignant ending sequence frames, in a low angle shot, Steve's farewell glance at the high mountains which had witnessed his prime and his decay, resisting the passage of time. This would effectively be the last time that Warshow's gentlemanly values would hold such sway in Peckinpah's masculine universe. The "high country" is thus an allegorical representation of a "high moral country" which becomes painfully a vanishing image on the horizon. The mountains acquire an aesthetic significance as they represent a landscape devoid of the corruption and venality that Coarse Gold, and the coarseness of its inhabitants, displays.

The image of Judd refreshing his aching feet by the river bank, commenting deprecatingly on his tattered, hole-riddled boots as he chastises young Heck for throwing away a piece of paper - "these mountains don't need your trash!" - reinforce the association of aging with more authentic values. Similarly, the moment when Steve and Westrum strip off their frayed clothes, disclosing their sagging bodies underneath their long-johns, as they reminisce about their past and brood over the paucity of their present options, projects what will be a central theme in Peckinpah's representation of masculinity: aging and the feeling of loss expressed through social anachronism and a personal sense of failure. In this perspective, his cinema reveals itself to be profoundly elegiac.

11. Gil Westrum and Steve Judd shot in a low-angle against the high mountains.

As Pike says affectionately to Dutch "Come on, you lazy bastard" whenever the latter lagged behind, it seems that these male partnerships have developed their own private code through oft-repeated phrases which their complicity and intimacy built over the years. To use Judge Tolland's words: "The glory of a good marriage comes later on. It's hard work". Interestingly, Peckinpah was only thirty seven when he directed *Ride the High Country* and the acute observation and insight he shows into the "glories of a good marriage" - in this case those resting on male bonding – shows that his dwelling on age was more of a conceit than felt experience. These men, unlike Shane, might have lost the controlling gaze but they certainly make their mark - even if through their vanishing glamour. In *Ride the High Country* Peckinpah dramatizes the central importance of male bonding which will be pervasive in all his *oeuvre*: gang-mentality appears as the surrogate for family connections and this explains why betrayal takes such a pivotal role in so many of his films and is so strongly portrayed as ontologically damaging. Kitses states:

> Like America itself, Peckinpah's flawed heroes look back to a visionary past of principles and loyalties now compromised and broken. Fallen idealists, at once the elect and the damned, these scarred characters are unable to live coherent lives in a changing world. As with Ford's characters, Peckinpah's heroes are rooted in history - their own and the land's - and like the latter martyrs of his predecessor, they are unable to reconcile individualism with the social (2004: 202).

Kitses also highlights how Scott's character is seen as morally diminished when set against Judd's stalwart sense of honor. Critics like Michael Bliss point out how "the difference between Gil and Steve are very much like that between Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid in Peckinpah's later film (1993: 47). However, Kitses also reinforces how these two life-long, albeit estranged, friends complete each other and comment, through their opposing stances, on the changing times which they have failed to keep up with.

> Discussion of this great work has often erred in relegating the Scott figure to a secondary role, despite his magnificent charge, like the cavalry in early Ford, to join the party in the ditch, his equal place in the gunfight, his survival. But these two characters are masks for the same face, expressions of the same spirit, the spirit of the American West. Judd and Westrum, judge and cowboy, vision and violence, Peckinpah insists that both were necessary in a savage land (2004: 210).

But in a world, as Prats suggests, that has no need for heroes, but preys on the fantasy of mythic invincibility (to which Gil's masquerade alludes), these men appear as the last remnants of heroism, handing down to the young couple an example of honor and self-sacrifice which should be a template for their future path. Yet, as Prats also observes, this is also a world soiled by Knudsen's fanaticism, the Hammond brothers' predatory sexuality and even the bankers' covetousness. Elsa and Heck will have to inhabit a dispiriting post-mythic America.

iii- *The Wild Bunch* : from recuperation to annihilation

"We're after men and I wish to God I was with them"
Deke Thornton (Robert Ryan) in *The Wild Bunch* (1969)

The Wild Bunch, Peckinpah's most admired and celebrated film, still remains controversial. From its first preview in Kansas City where people's reactions went from physical revulsion to hypnotic enthrallment,[25] the film was bound to be trouble and to raise the issue of screen violence. Apropos of this question, Robert Kolker argues:

> The sometimes cynical employment of film violence that developed in the films of Penn and other film makers in the sixties did not go undetected and unexplored. Violence is an easy way to command emotional response under the pretense of realism. Penn showed the way. *Bonnie and Clyde* opened the bloodgates and our cinema has barely stopped bleeding since (2000: 49).

The Wild Bunch traces the life of a group of outlaws on the run who, after an aborted attempt to rob the railroad office in Starbuck, go to Mexico to try to figure out what their next move will be, and where they end up plying their trade against the mischievous Mexican General Mapache (Emilio Fernandez). Led by Pike (William Holden), the other members are the faithful, second-in-command Dutch (Ernest Borgnine), the volatile and scurrilous Gorch Brothers, Tector (Ben Johnson) and Lyle (Warren Oates), and Angel, (Jaime Sanchez) the Mexican member. Finally, old Sykes (Edmond O'Brien) joins the Bunch. Whereas Pat, in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, argues that "comes an age in a man's life when he don't wanna spend time figuring out what comes next", this Bunch of outlaws is still trying to figure out what comes next, hoping that one last good score will be their opportunity to retire. In an interview with Stephen Faber, Peckinpah said:

> The outlaws of the West have always fascinated me. They had a certain notoriety, they were supposed to have a Robin Hood quality about them, which was not really the truth, but they were strong individuals; in a land for all intents and purposes without law, they made their own (1969: 9).

[25] Michael Sragow's description of experiencing the film in a movie theatre is suggestive: "To discover *The Wild Bunch* in the Summer of '69 was to be shocked, riveted, moved, pummeled and finally reduced to awe" (Bliss 1994: 182).

In a related vein, he also stressed his privileged relationship *vis-à-vis* these marginal figures in an interview with William Murray:

> I love outsiders. Look, unless you conform, give in completely, you're going to be alone in the world. But by giving in, you lose your independence as a human being. So I go for the loners. I'm nothing if not a romantic and I've got this weakness for losers on the grand scale, as well as a kind of sneaky affection for all the misfits and drifters in the world (Hayes: 109).

The initial images of the film, introducing the characters on horseback garbed in military attire, purport to deceive and thwart the spectators' expectations since it is soon clear that these military men are actually criminals whose intention is to rob the payroll from the railroad office. As the first credits roll, these men are frozen in a kind of black and white, newsprint style, interspersed with colored sequences and punctuated by Jerry Fielding's martial music. The interlocking of images is effected with a sense of coolness and self-possession, as we watch these men, alert and vigilant, riding past a group of children who are torturing a scorpion on an anthill. This notorious scene acquires contours of foreboding, as it points to the sense of entrapment that will haunt these men's subsequent endeavors. Moreover, the scorpion devoured by ants not only serves as a metaphor for the heroes' doomed fate but also hints suggestively at Peckinpah's reflexive stance on the destructive, albeit beguiling, nature of violence. The children's delight while watching the destruction suggests the perverse pleasures entailed by impromptu violent deeds, contrasting with their former innocent expressions,[26] which maybe implicates audience in their conspiracy of delight.

Only when these self-assured men get to the office, but not before displaying their gentlemanly qualities - another deceiving ploy by Peckinpah - by helping a lady cross the street, do we realize what they are there for. As Pike barks his command " if they move kill

[26] Peckinpah actually said in an interview with Richard Whitehall "I believe in the complete innocence of children. They have no idea of good and evil. It's an acquired taste" (Hayes: 52). Interestingly, in *The Left Handed Gun* (1958) Arthur Penn also showed how children can be attracted to violence when in a particular scene a young child approaches curiously a dead man on the ground and is then scolded and dragged away by her mother.

them", his frozen image is superimposed by the final, challenging credit "directed by Sam Peckinpah", revealing a kind of self-projecting gusto that Sragow defines as "the boldest directorial signature in movie history" (1994: 121). From this point onwards, the violent action unravels through a careful montage where slow-motion photography is conjoined with rapid cutting and multiple camera shots, resulting in a novel but somewhat disorientating style. A posse of white-trash bounty hunters is waiting for them, led by Deke Thornton (Robert Ryan), Pike's nemesis and erstwhile partner in crime. Deke is a convict who is being forced by Harrigan (Albert Dekker), the railroad man, who represents "the law" to track down and capture Pike and his Bunch. As in a great many of his films, Peckinpah muses over the travails of friendship and the way male bonding is tested in a world of corporate power and moneyed interests. Thornton's weary expression as he reminisces about his time in prison point to the character's spiritual depletion and pent-up frustration with the corrupt power that holds him captive. "How does it feel to be so goddamn right? he rebukes Harrigan when the latter threatens him with "going back to Yuma" if he doesn't succeed in his mission.

After this opening set-piece where Peckinpah jolts the spectator[27] out of any comfortable viewing position, the Bunch manage to escape, riding again past the group of children who have now set fire to the trap they had built, a disturbing vision which symbolically glances back to the blood bath which has taken place but also foreshadows the Bunch's demise. Notwithstanding the images of carnage which throw into question the Bunch's morality - after all, they had no qualms in maiming, shooting, trampling over with their horses anyone who stood in their way - they appear as the only possible protagonists in a scenario where hypocrisy is writ large, whether it be the teetotal citizenry of the Temperance union with their "shall we gather at the river" hymn or Harrigan's skullduggery.

With right and wrong so muddled, we hold on to the points of reference which the iconography of the genre has always validated, allowing us to take sides and distinguish

[27] Peckinpah recognizing the opposing reactions that his film was bound to elicit from audiences made the following comment in an interview with John Cutts in 1969: "I think a lot of people are going to be shocked - least I hope so. I hate an audience that just sits there" (Hayes: 60).

heroism (Alan Ladd as Shane) from villainy, (Jack Palance as Wilson), and self-assurance, equated with true manhood (John Wayne in Hawks's *Rio Bravo*) from feebleness and inadequacy (Elisha Cook Junior's character in *Shane*). Professionalism and good looks have always been crucial to the moral scheme in which shows of violence play a part. Contrasted with the vulpine "egg-sucking, chicken-stealing, gutter-trash" bounty hunters who pounce on corpses to loot whatever they can, the Bunch's questionable moral standards and their *sangfroid* seem less disreputable and so elicit our sympathy. Interestingly, the Western has always equated morality with looks, something which Leone parodies in his *Dollar Trilogy*. Bad teeth, disheveled, unshaved or sweaty faces point to corruption, meanness and rapacity. Peckinpah was also a key player in the dirtying-down of the Western.

Accordingly, when the Bunch discover they had been ambushed by Harrigan and have fallen into a trap and the only thing they had managed to steal was a bag full of worthless washers, Pike realizes they have to start "thinking beyond their guns", as those days "are closing fast". Pike's dawning realization of their own obsolescence is apparent in the physical decay of his own body. One of these painful moments is when, after listening to the scathing remarks of the Gorch brothers, needling him about his miscalculations and blunders, Pike attempts to get on his horse and falls down due to his leg wound; his sense of humiliation is made more acute by the jeering remarks of the mocking brothers: "Brother Pike and Brother Sykes should pick up their chips and find another game", they chide with sarcasm. The representation of bodily feebleness is stressed by Dutch's rueful expression, and by the framing of Pike's back in a long shot which shows his hunched, tired shoulders and his *quasi*-defeated stance. Mitchell says:

> What Peckinpah achieves through the presence of such aging actors as Strother Martin, Edmund O'Brien and Emilio Fernandez, William Holden and Robert Ryan is a resurrection of a myth of a heroic West through a sort of mediated desire (their desire to see it again creating a similar desire in us). All define through wrinkled eyes, sagging skin, bulging midriffs and tired movements the sense that we as well have arrived too late and that their best years (and films) are well behind them (242).

In a related vein, Paul Seydor's comments are also apposite when he writes how Peckinpah cashes in on Holden's leading man looks to inflect Pike with a fading glamour, still projecting an appealing masculinity, though one already marked by the ravages of time:

> Throughout the fifties - in films like *The Horse Soldiers*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Picnic*, *Sunset Boulevard* and *Stalag 17* (the last two directed by Billy Wilder, another director Peckinpah admires) - Holden played characters who are loners, outsiders, cynics, skeptics, misfits, compromised and compromising men who turn out at the very end of their lives to be reluctant, sometimes accidental, idealists, men who often wind up dying for that residue of integrity they are surprised to discover they still possess. Pike Bishop, as Peckinpah conceives him, and as Holden plays him, can be thought of as an older version of this same composite character, which is what the director meant when he once described the film as being "about what Bill Holden is today -fifty, middle-aged, wrinkled, no longer the golden boy". The transformation in Pike throughout the several drafts of the screenplay to the completed film constitutes a prime example of the way Peckinpah adapts a character to fit the emotional and psychological requirements of an actor, and also the way he makes the personality and ambience of a star work for a role (1994: 121).

Thus, whereas age has also been addressed in films like *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* or even *True Grit* which exposed the ageing process of their heroes, Peckinpah's film is painfully aware of the emptiness of the code on which he relies to legitimize his idealistic and romanticized vision of male bonding. As Pike argues, trying to avail himself of some sense of purpose: "We're gonna stick together like we used to be. When you side with a man, you stay with him and if you can't do that, you're like some animal". In this sense, Mitchell argues:

> The film significantly makes a fetish of the idea of loyalty - as if Peckinpah were actually reconstituting a possibility that Leone had parodied - only to reveal that code more in the breach than in the practice (245).

The flashbacks which purport to show Pike's memories of the past are racked with the character's rueful recognition that he failed those he loved, his best friend Thornton who was caught due to his carelessness and over-confidence ("being sure is my goddamn business") and the woman from his past killed by an estranged, albeit avenging, husband. Accordingly, Pike's abiding allegiance to a code of loyalty seems a desperate attempt to

cling to a moralizing stance which he constantly betrays through his poor misjudgments, flaws and contradictions. In this he distinguishes himself from Judd's unswerving code as the latter, to use Thornton's embittered words, knows that "what he likes and what he needs are two different things". This self-imposed awareness stems from painfully accepting the paucity of their options and doing the best they can with what they have been left.

When the Bunch cross the Rio Grande and reach Mexico, Angel's idealism can be inferred from his enraptured comment "*Qui lindo",* his fascination being immediately undermined by the Gorchs' detached perspective: "I don't see nothing so *lindo* about it. It looks a bit more of Texas to me"; to this remark Angel reprehends "Ah, you have no eyes" suggesting a sentimental view of his home. The Bunch's interlude in Angel's village is one of the most compelling sequences in the film[28], the one that makes these ruthless men emerge as human beings. Mexico had always held a special appeal for Peckinpah and this is perceived not only in the *fiesta* that welcomes the Bunch, but also in the way he portrays the Mexican villagers: with a streak of sentimental romanticism, they represent Peckinpah's vision of a country still untouched by corruption, about which he said in his famous interview with William Murray:

> The country has a special effect on me…In Mexico it's all out front- the color, the life, the warmth. Here in this county, everybody is worried about stopping the war and saving the forests and all that, but these same crusaders go out the door in the morning forgetting to kiss their wives and water the flowers. In Mexico they don't worry so goddamn much about saving the human race or about the wheeling and dealing that's poisoning us. In Mexico they don't forget to kiss each other and water the flowers (Hayes: 118).

The Bunch's venal deal with General Mapache - stealing an ammunition train to strengthen his position in the fight against Villa's revolutionaries - infuriates Angel, as Mapache had been responsible for his father's death and his fiancé's flight from the village ("she went

[28], Paul Schrader observes that Sam Peckinpah considered the scene at Angel's village "the most important in the film", particularly when the old villager and revolutionary Don Jose (Chano Hurueta) tells Pike "We all dream of being children… even the worst of us" (1994: 25).

drunk with love and wine", as Don Jose tells him). Pike admonishes him "You either learn to live with it or I'll leave you right here", asserting his control over the group as he had previously done "I don't know a damn thing except that I either lead this bunch or end it right now". Moreover, he also derisively argues, attracted by Mapache's proposal, that "ten thousand dollars cut a lot of family ties", a cynical remark which is a contradiction of Peckinpah's value-system.

Whilst America's paternalistic relations with Mexico had already been foregrounded in films like *The Magnificent Seven* (John Sturges, 1960) or *The Professionals* (Richard Brooks, 1966) Peckinpah's forays into this cherished territory are imbued with a garish vitalism which is more akin to Huston's Mexican villagers - in *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* (1948) - rather than to the hapless, white-garbed figures in Sturges's film. The latter tends to infantilize Mexicans by rendering them too dependent on American gumption and acumen to survive on their own, a projection of the ideological underpinnings supporting American counterinsurgency policies in South Vietnam. Agua Verde is characterized by an almost surreally perpetual mood of celebration, and yet, recalling the loutish debauchery of the mining camp town Coarse Gold in *Ride the High Country*, the town appears rent by contradictory axes: there is the military mood of exhilaration and the disturbing signs of a stultifying civilian life as portrayed by women suckling their children with artillery straps around their chests or prostitutes who ply their trade with Mapache and his entourage of advisers. The General is first seen as he glides through the village in a shimmering automobile in triumph, the glossy look of the car contrasting with the Bunch's dusty horses. Indeed, they almost collide with each other, the trappings of an old life style, entrenched in the frontier pioneering past, pitted against the mechanical future emblemized by the speeding car. Paul Seydor emphasizes how the idea of collision permeates the narrative - starting in the Starbuck sequence where Pike bumps accidentally into a woman crossing the road - here serving to heighten the contrast between the technological world of Mapache's car and the Bunch's fading West, a scene which, as Seydor suggests, is imbued with a touch of surreal humor:

> If, as Levi-Strauss has shown us, every age has its mythology, its religion as it were, then Peckinpah is especially attuned to the mythology of technological progress, which he often views cynically. Yet, he also has an extraordinary sense - unparalleled in cinema since Keaton - of the absurdist possibilities for drama in the confrontation of living organisms with mechanical contraptions, and it is this sense more than anything else which prevents any pat moralizing or easy editorializing against the evils of progress in his depiction of machines. And that surrealistic element which creeps into his work from time to time is nowhere more apparent than in what he does with machines in his Western settings (1994: 125).

This idea of collision permeates Peckinpah's narratives since he was so interested in conflict and irreconcilable sides, acquiring a visual resonance in examples such as the one described.

The scene where the Bunch steal the ammunition cases from the moving train bears out what Thornton says when asked by one of the posse hunters what kind of a man they were dealing with: "The best, he never got caught". His remarks are framed by his bitter memory of the moment Pike managed to escape from a brothel, leaving him behind to be captured and sent to prison. The plan is carried out with precision and strategic ingenuity which pays tribute to the Bunch's reputation as professionals. This also recalls contemporaneous films like *The Professionals* or *The Dirty Dozen,* where a bunch of disaffected outlaws perform with efficiency and expediency missions which defy the methods of orthodoxy. Moreover, the unravelling of the action is punctuated by a slow-paced rhythm in which each one of the members carries out their tasks with clockwork precision. This is also underlined by the way they parcel out the delivery of the ammunition cases to Mapache and his men, suspicious of the latter's greed and aware of the unpredictability that the transaction entails. Despite this, Mapache seems to get the upper hand taking Angel as prisoner when he discovers the latter's retaining one of the cases to help his people's revolution. In this context, the Bunch face a dilemma that calls into question Pike's "sticking together" policy and positions them in a moral predicament. With Angel falling prey to Mapache's ferocious violence, the posse bearing down on them and old Sykes being shot and deserted by his companions, who feel powerless to help him, Pike decides to go back to Agua Verde, seeing this as all they can decently do. The sight of Angel being tortured, tethered to the

automobile and dragged through the dusty streets by drunken drivers, provokes a revulsion which awakens Pike's consciousness and a recapitulation of his "sticking together" speech.

This is followed by a momentous turn in the narrative where Pike, having been with a young prostitute, looks at her gentle gestures dabbing her neck and chest with a wet cloth; a baby is seen crying on the dusty floor wrapped in rags. Pike's expression is one of dejection while she curiously looks at him, wondering where the source of his despair might lie. The exchange of their looks, this man damaged by all the wrong choices he has made and this young woman caught in the abjection of sexual submission seems to ignite the urge to fight against a general entrapment and oppression. As he walks into the other room where the Gorch brothers haggle over the price they should pay the half-naked, miserable prostitute they have been with, he utters his rallying cry: "Let's go". The struggling, dying sparrow which Tector had been torturing and which lies on the ground seems to reflect all the purposeless acts of violence which have framed these men's existences. The scene gathers momentum as the Bunch march down the streets of Agua Verde, their intent underscored by the martial music which turns their walk into a moment of pleasurable self-assurance despite their knowledge (and ours) that they are marching to their own destruction.

What follows next is the mayhem which sickened so many of the Kansas City spectators at the film's first preview. As Mapache slits Angel's throat, the Bunch react by killing the general and after a moment of ominous silence, only broken by Dutch's familiar grin, Pike kills the German officer and a violent, bloody battle ensues. Like the Starbuck set-piece, the Agua Verde combat is achieved through exquisite technical work of montage, creating a balletic portrayal of violent death. Tellingly, the machine gun acquires such a symbolic status, mounted on a tripod, taking up a central space, everyone from Pike to Lyle takes turns at shooting it in almost psychotic mode. The sight of Lyle taken over by an orgiastic thrill, while holding the machine in his hands and shooting at everything that moves, is probably one of the most disquieting scenes in the whole battle sequence, a fascist celebration of the exercise of destructive power or a sort of solution to all the complexities and dilemmas of life. This violent resolution struck a chord in spectators who faced the

violence of the Vietnam conflict as it entered their homes, broadcast on the daily news. The film thus comes full circle and the Starbuck massacre is again dramatized in Mapache's Agua Verde's encampment, completing the schema of pairings around which the plot is structured. Michael Bliss underlines this idea:

> Two of the film's most striking characteristics are its plethora of conceptual doublings (two friends alienated from each other, two collections of associates, two major shootouts, two robberies, two debates about what to do about Angel) and its circular structure reminds us that no matter what we do or how far we roam, we must always return to a confrontation with the need to establish a set of values to live by (1994: xvii).

And yet, these killers come off as perversely heroic in their destructive drives, in their final grand gesture of dying for a lost cause. Peckinpah was aware of this and he plays on our mixed feelings, making us root for these flawed losers. Whereas *Ride the High Country* posits the theme of education which the Western has often explored whereby Steve Judd's death and the values he embodied are passed on to the young couple, in *The Wild Bunch* the youngest member of the Bunch, who allegedly should be coaxed into embracing the Western code of manhood by his elders, is the one who seems to educate the older members telling them that a life bereft of ideals is emptied of meaning. Thus, while Leone's heroes look like automatons with their affectless countenances, Peckinpah's protagonists are riven by contradictions and internal struggles as they strive for a residue of idealism but are faced with their own human fallibility. Peckinpah romantically clings to a chivalric code of honor, realizing that this honor has already been compromised to the point of extinction.

12. Pike Bishop (William Holden) and his Bunch in their final march before self-sacrifice and mayhem.

The devastation of the last scenes of the film is followed by the grim procession of mourning survivors who leave town, some wounded, others mutilated, suggesting the flotsam and jetsam left over after war. The vulpine bounty hunters engage in the possibilities of pillage, as piles of corpses litter the streets. T.C (L.Q. Jones) cheers and whoops as he spots Pike's dead body, "You ain't so much now are you, Mr Pike?" As is the case with Billy the Kid, one is spared the sight of these dead protagonists and of their splintered, ravaged bodies, as they already seem inscribed in the mythic past. This chimes in with previous arguments where the dissolution of the masculine body suggests the collapse of phallic empowerment, and the melancholy regression into nostalgia appears as an escape from the spiritual erosion of modernity. This suggests Peckinpah's regressive narcissism, his rejection of contemporary times, perceived as corrupt and predatory. Carl Plantinga's notion of "the paradox of negative emotions" (10) is also called to mind since any negative emotion which this striking final set-piece elicits is tempered by a nostalgic

mood of celebration of a masculinity inscribed in the past and glamorized through self-sacrifice. His words are worth citing:

> My claim is that sympathetic narratives always elicit negative emotions, but they manage such elicitation by attenuating the force of negative emotions; mixing negative with positive emotions, such that the painful is mixed with the pleasurable; and enabling a cognitive and emotional process of "working through" the painful experiences represented, such that negative emotions are replaced with positive emotions that gain their force in part from the power of the previously felt negative emotions. This "working through", I would argue, comes in many forms or types of fantasies; among the most prominent of these are "fantasies of assurance and control" (197).

13. Deke Thornton sadly looking on the dead body of his old buddy, Pike Bishop.

As Deke sits outside the gates of Agua Verde, Sykes approaches him together with a group of Mexican revolutionaries, inviting him to join them "Me and the boys here have some work to do, you wanna come along? Ain't like it used to be but it will do". And Thornton with Pike's gun already in his holster, a token of friendship which he was able to salvage before the scavengers' assault, laughs together with Sykes and goes along, even

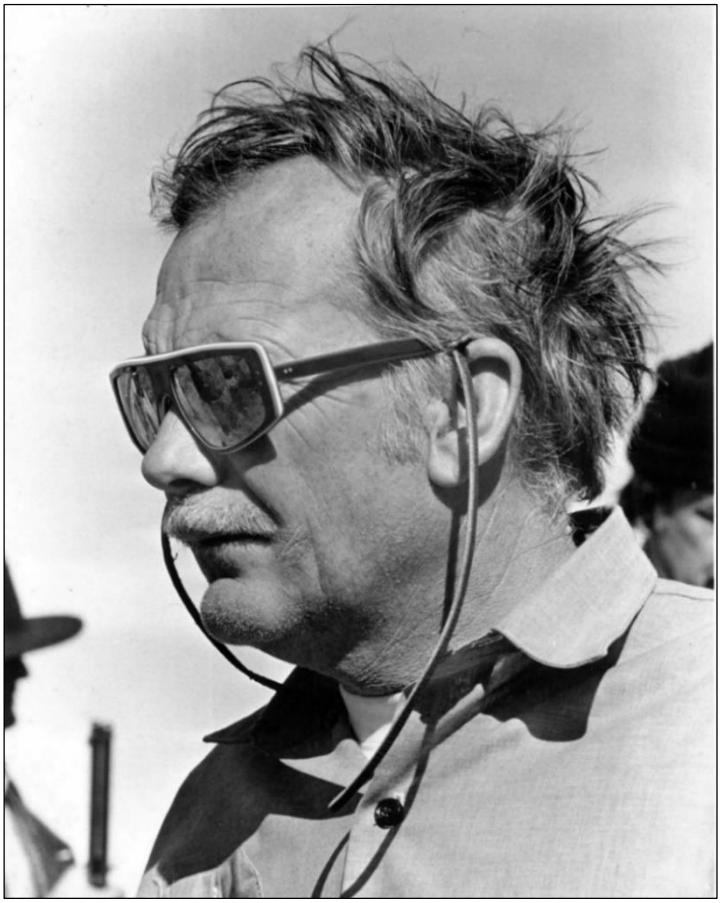
understanding that it is not like it used to be. Their laughter elides with previous images from the film in which the Bunch had laughed uproariously on several occasions, laughed at their own shortcomings, at their mistakes, at their thwarted expectations. In a moving tribute to the film, Michael Bliss argues:

> And yet, for one last time recalling Pike's "stick together" speech we realize that in an important sense, it is (to us both Pike and Sykes's words) "like it used to be". The bunch in a new incarnation are spiritually and physically together again, a fact affirmed by the action that next takes place: the repetition of bond-creating gestures that occurred between Pike and Dutch outside the Agua Verde adobe (which tell us that Sykes now equals Pike and that Thornton is now his sidekick). Thornton looks up and begins to smile: Sykes laughs, Thornton laughs (…) it's not only like it used to be, it's better and that eventually all of them - Pike, Thornton, Angel, Dutch, the Gorches and Sykes - will finally be united - in legend, in memory, forever (1994: 167).

This is perhaps the last moment that laughter can exorcise a deep-seated anxiety over the loss of an empowered masculinity. Strangely, it will be recuperated a little in his much-berated *Convoy*, where Dirty Lyle (Ernest Borgnine)'s final laughter sanctions the convoy and its defiance of authority. The nostalgic fantasy for meaningful action, "like it used to be", still beckons to these flawed "heroes" with a promise of redemption, but things are getting deadly serious. The Bunch's suicidal move bespeaks the late 1960s pessimism and existential angst where the idealism symbolized by Angel no longer holds sway. Thus, he is brutally assassinated while the older members of the Bunch, in a nihilistic dramatization of self-destruction, walk into the soothing realm of myth. But there is no turning back and things will never be "like they used to be".

Part III

Melancholia in the Films of Sam Peckinpah



14. “I grew up on a ranch. But that world is gone. Now I’m an expatriate. I feel rootless, completely. It’s disturbing, very much so. But there’s nothing you can do about it, nothing”, Sam Peckinpah in an interview with Dan Yergin, 1971 (Hayes 2008: 91).

IV- Melancholia: of sadness and grief without a cause

> "For those who are racked by melancholia, writing about it would have meaning only if writing sprang out of that very melancholia" Julia Kristeva in *Black Sun, Depression and Melancholia* (1989: 3)

In this section, I will look at how persistent states of unhappiness have been theorized, before turning to questions of the cultural representation of melancholia. In an influential and challenging reflection on depression and melancholia, Julia Kristeva sets out to ponder their nature and origin: "Where does this black sun come from? Out of what eerie galaxy do its invisible, lethargic rays reach me, pinning me down to the ground, to my bed, compelling me to silence, to renunciation?" (1989: 3). This language captures the elusive, slippery boundaries which have failed to distinguish clearly both terms and the way they have been construed as a single malaise. The attempt to distinguish one from the other is relatively recent but for centuries today's concept of depression was merged with the all-comprising host of symptoms that melancholia incorporated. It is significant that Kristeva does not attempt to set them apart since both signal the same underlying cluster of traits. As she argues: "Thus I shall speak of depression and melancholia without always distinguishing the particularities of the two ailments but keeping in mind their common structure" (10-11). The black sun and the eerie galaxy seem to be appropriate metaphors to project the affective mood which sprang from "fear and sadness without cause" (Radden 2009: 12), a description which often accompanied the many accounts of this - rather unfathomable - subjective disposition. Kristeva also lays the groundwork for reflecting upon the nature of moods pivotal in descriptions and representations of melancholia. She argues:

> Sadness is the fundamental mood of depression and even if maniac euphoria alternates with it in the bipolar forms of that ailment, sorrow is the major outward sign that gives away the desperate person. Sadness leads us into the enigmatic realm of affects - anguish, fear or joy. Irreducible to its verbal or semiological expressions, sadness (like all affect) is *the psychic representation of energy displacements* caused by internal or external traumas. The exact status of such psychic representations of energy displacements remains, in the present state of psychoanalytic and semiological theories, very vague (1989: 21).

Kristeva's words are significant since the difficulties in describing melancholia and differentiating it from depressive illness seem to lie in emotional states or moods. As Stanley Jackson argues in his analysis of melancholia:

> In the clinical descriptions of melancholia over the centuries, fear and sadness were usually central features. Thus these emotional states, or passions or perturbations of the soul as they were called in earlier times, had the status of symptoms of a disease. But they also had the status of affects, and this led to their having a place in various theories of the passions or emotions over the centuries. In those contexts, they were usually aspects of someone's philosophical views on the nature of men or, later, someone's philosophical psychology. And in some of these contexts the passions themselves were thought of as "diseases of the soul" (1986: 15).

This has led Jackson to conclude that melancholia has been construed with "descriptive consistency" (30) and the diversity of its historically rendered definitions have thrown up the same set of features refashioned or refigured according to value-laden cultural landscapes. In a related vein, the work of Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl[29] (1979) on melancholia traces its historical trajectory in detail and emphasizes how the term came to encompass an ambiguous duality, oscillating between illness, with bodily manifestations, and mood, a temperamental inclination. They state apropos of this duality:

> [For] the ambiguity of psychological symptoms blurred the borderline between illness and normality and compelled recognition of a habitude which, though being melancholy, did not make it necessary to describe the subject as one who was really a sick man all the time. This peculiarity was bound to shift the whole conception of melancholy into the realm of psychology and physiognomy, thereby making way for a transformation of the doctrine of the four humours into a theory of characters and mental types (1979: 15).

The first accounts of melancholia can be traced back to ancient times. It is not however the goal of this work to offer a detailed historical account of melancholia, but only to show how the constitutive mood of melancholia - sadness - contributes to a glamorized construction of masculinity which in the Western genre, and in particular in Sam Peckinpah's work, has acquired a special resonance. The intention is to prepare the ground for the analysis of

[29] The first edition was published in 1962.

melancholia's dramatic imprint on cinematic representations. Moreover, the idea of loss, which was cited by Freud as the central feature binding up the psychic mechanisms of mourning and melancholia, will be also axiomatic in this reflection.

Jennifer Radden, exploring cross-cultural and cross-historical views on melancholia, argues that "these include its association with inspiration, brilliance, and gender - particularly the ostensible contrast between heroic and glamorous masculine melancholy and the abject and "feminine" suffering of today's depression" (2009: 16). This premise prepares the ground for exploring this concept and the way it has always exerted an aesthetic attraction in its multifarious manifestations. Although melancholia in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century lost ideological ground to depression, it has nonetheless survived in its romanticized form and has resurfaced in masculine constructions as an appealing emotional depth. It is significant that Mark Nicholls, drawing upon this perspective, and analyzing Scorsese's male protagonists, aligns them with a profound melancholy stance, which is correlated with their being "men apart" (Nicholls 2004: 2), displaying a "wounded but triumphant masculinity" (xvi).

As Kristeva testifies, from its very onset melancholia has been an elusive term. Even linguistically the murkiness has put down roots. Melancholia and melancholy were used interchangeably in the first accounts of this malaise[30] in the English language but while the former has come to imply more clinical application, the latter has been used to embrace affective and subjective features displayed by those afflicted. Radden explains how melancholy was more associated with a mood or short-term disposition whereas melancholia came to encompass the "pathological or clinical dimensions of this condition" (2009: 64) and in this latter sense it has coalesced into the present day "depression". From the Latin *deprimere* which means to" press down", depression encapsulates the psychological and physical symptoms which have always been subsumed under the terms melancholia or melancholy. The shift from melancholia into depression traces the

[30] In her essay "Is this dame Melancholy?"- Equating Today's Depression and Past Melancholia" Radden argues that the terms melancholy and melancholia "were used interchangeably until the nineteenth century" (Radden 2009:75).

advancement of medicine and the burgeoning emphasis on behavioral rather than emotional or affective symptoms. In its attempt to generate more objective and value-free accounts of melancholic dispositions, medical explanations have moved towards signs which could be measured and assessed. About this, Radden states:

> Clinical depression then, unlike the earlier melancholy, is characterized as much or more by certain behavioral manifestations as by the moods or feelings it involves: by a slowing or agitation of movement and by fatigue, loss of appetite, and insomnia. And despite the etymology of "depression" remarked earlier, most of these manifestations do not have the symbolic power to reinforce and remind us of the mood underlying them. Loss of appetite, fatigue, insomnia, and agitated movement do not as naturally seem to suggest dejection to an untrained observer as do the formalized melancholy gestures and motifs of the literature and painting of the seventeenth century, such as the drooping head (2009: 67).

Significantly, exploring the way Western civilization has dealt with madness, Michel Foucault has also elaborated on the way it shifted from a loosely bound notion of "unreason" into a symptom-based mental illness which, in the "geography of evil" (2001: 205), was therefore "marked by an imaginary stigma of disease, which added its powers of terror" (205). Confinement emerged then as a power apparatus which was meant to control and to exert surveillance over unbalanced states of mind whose severed bonds with reality were frightening *per se*. Suffice it to say, as Foucault argues, melancholia was often perceived as an "entire causal system" (118) that underlay states of frenzied unreason, confirming its conceptual murkiness.

Depression is thus divested of the symbolic and cultural power that melancholia has always possessed and as such it has lost the dramatic appeal that the melancholia of old, to use Radden's expression, had projected. It is no wonder therefore that depression has become a woman's affliction, lacking the Aristotelian ascription that melancholy men were exceptional and gifted. Radden further argues:

> Another difference between the earlier melancholy and today's clinical depression is that the latter is a woman's complaint. One analysis has proposed that twice as many women as men suffer from depression in middle and upper-class America; other

> authorities suggest higher figures. Our current image of the depression sufferer is - or ought to be - assuming those who complain of depression suffer accordingly - a woman. But although no comparable figures are available for the earlier period the reverse seems to be true of melancholy. While Dürer's series depicts a woman, the rakes, poets, scholars and artists who suffered from melancholy were men; the stage *melancholique* was standardly a male figure (2009: 67).

And significantly, she goes on to conclude that:

> It is not today fashionable to affect the women's condition of depression, in the way that it was once to affect melancholy. Now depression is a scourge and an "illness"- something in many circles, to be concealed or denied (67).

Apropos of the term *depression*, Mathew Bell analyses how the etymology of the term transmits the idea of being weighed down by feelings of sadness and worthlessness. He claims the label is a "natural fit for a mind weighed down by the world and itself. In the word *depression* there is a reassuring continuum between the realm of science and everyday experience" (2014: 35-36). When pitted against melancholia, depression seems to hold the upper hand with its scientific authority. As Bell states, comparing both:

> There is nothing reassuringly metaphorical about it. It is far less intuitive than depression. In linguistic terms, it is foreign. Etymologically it descends from Ancient Greek via Latin. Aside from its Anglicized form *melancholy* and the adjective *melancholic*, it has no widely used cognates. By contrast, depression belongs to a large family of semantically related words that are in everyday use. These include the verb depress and many other words formed with *-press* such as *oppress* and *repress*. Not least thanks to its large number of relatives, depression helpfully connects the mental disorder to a set of commonly verbalized experiences (36).

The treatment of melancholia can be traced back to Graeco-Roman medical analyses which attempted to cast light on what was seen as a mood perturbation with bodily manifestations. Having begun in folk lore, passing through the arts and having been the object of thoroughgoing investigation in science, it has stirred the attention of lay opinion and scientific interest alike since it aligns the body and the mind and the way the former affects the latter. Stanley Jackson argues:

> As a mood, affect, or emotion, the experience of being melancholy or depressed has probably been as well known to our species as any of the other human feeling states. The wide range of terms and the emotional variations to which they refer, have reflected matters at the very heart of being human: feeling down, or blue or unhappy, being dispirited, discouraged, disappointed, dejected, despondent, melancholy, sad, depressed or despairing - states that surely touch something in the experience of just about everyone. From discouragement or dejection over material and interpersonal disappointment to sadness or despondency over separation or loss, to be human is to know about such emotions (3).

Hippocrates and his medical school attempted to systematize the symptoms of what was perceived as an imbalance in the four humors: blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm. The theoretical work set out by the Hippocratic school had a significant impact on the development of subsequent theories and even when it was challenged by chemical (in the seventeenth century) or mechanical explanations (in the eighteenth century), rooted in more scientific principles, the humoural theory often resurfaced. According to ancient writings on the issue of melancholia, black bile was the bodily substance which gave rise to melancholic states. Any disturbance in its balance would result in dejection, despondency and sluggishness. Thus, body and mind appear bound up in these first accounts since grief and sorrow are inscribed in and projected by bodily manifestations.

The idea of black bile as the primary source of melancholy states would be taken up by Aristotle, who expanded on the Hippocratic humoral paradigm, ascribing importance to the black substance as inducing fear and sadness without cause. This idea became pivotal in subsequent adumbrations of the melancholy disposition and would also lay the ground for the Renaissance rehabilitation of the despondent, albeit glamorous, person epitomized by the *homo melancholicus*, which endowed masculinity with the charm of brilliancy and geniality. Aristotle's views, though fundamentally gendered and bordering on misogyny, held strong aesthetic sway. In the famous and influential work *Problems/Problemata*[31] the authorship of which has been questioned,[32] Aristotle sets out to equate melancholia with

[31] Klibansky *et al* include in their work the complete text with the Greek original and the English translation.
[32] Despite speculations on the authorship of the text, Klibansky *et al* argue that the text displays evidence of Aristotelian style and concerns. They state: "It is typically Aristotelian not only to try to show a connection between mental and physical processes (as the Hippocrateans had begun to do) but to try to prove it down to the last detail" (33).

intellectual achievement and exceptional cognitive capabilities, starting with the often-cited question:

> Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic and some to such an extent that they are infected by the diseases arising from black bile, as the story of Heracles among the heroes tells? (Radden 2000: 57).

Jonathan Flatley elaborates on this connection by highlighting its impact on the romantic literary movement:

> The Renaissance interest in the relationship between melancholy and genius and the corresponding popularity of melancholy was revived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In British and German Romanticism, as we know, melancholy is a major theme, from Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* to Keats's "Ode on Melancholy" (2008:38).

Interestingly, Flatley also states:

> The Renaissance returned to Aristotle and other Greek texts and *rescued melancholics from hell*. Marsilio Ficino is the key figure here. In 1489 he published his *Books of Life*, wherein he argued, among other things, that melancholy was the necessary temperament of thinkers and philosophers, who are inclined to think and brood over things that are impossible and difficult and absent. Ficino also incorporated the astrological tradition of writing about Saturn and its conception, linking the melancholic to the person born "under Saturn" (36). (my italics)

Klibansky *et al* show how Saturn became associated with melancholy dispositions gaining a special prominence in Italian Humanism through the work of Ficino. Encompassing contradictory qualities, which can be life-affirming but also life-denying, Saturn came to represent the dual, ambiguous nature of melancholia, where all those devoted to *la vita speculativa* (245) were associated with a sad demeanour.

Another prominent figure of ancient medicine whose work and writings on melancholia extended well beyond its epoch was the Greek physician Galen. Influenced by Hippocratic medicine, he went to great lengths to explain melancholy predispositions and introduced some innovative precepts of his own reasoning, like the notion of atrabilious humor which

he preferred to the one of the black bile. Galenic theorization was predicated on the association of qualities with the humors. As Radden puts it:

> With the four elements of earth, air, fire and water were associated qualities: fire was associated with heat, air with cold, water with moisture and earth with dryness. The four humors of blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm were also attached to these elements and qualities. Thus black bile was cold and dry, yellow bile warm and dry, phlegm cold and moist and blood warm and moist. It was this emphasis on the four qualities of warm, cold and dry and moist that marked Galen's contribution to humoral theory (2000:62).

Moreover, as Aristotle had already done, Galen emphasized the importance of subjective states of fear and despondency attendant upon melancholia which prepared the ground for future postulations whereby the melancholy disposition and temperament were mainly deemed a disorder of affective mood. Bell also argues: "In Galenism, melancholia became something more than just a disease or even a physiological substance. It became a *character type, a temperament, and as such it had potential applications in other discourses beyond medicine, notably in ethics and poetry*" (43). (my italics)

In the Christian tradition, melancholia was tinged with the notion of *accidia* and *tristitia*. These were construed as negative, sinful feelings that impeded the joyful disposition that should define men's relation with God. Melancholia was often associated with uncontrolled despondency, which rendered the victims helpless and prone to more earthly temptations, precluding moral and spiritual elevation. As Radden states:

> In Western Europe, meanwhile, an additional set of concerns around states of despondency and inertia had arisen. Rather than melancholy, *accidia* and *tristitia* were a reflection of moral failings, even sins. For the early Catholic Church fathers Evagrius and Cassian, listlessness and dejection were inimical to the joyful attitude befitting a Christian. As preoccupations of the medieval Christian church misogyny, witchcraft and demonology also changed how melancholia came to be attributed and understood. Melancholia was a morally dangerous state, "a devil's bath" inviting demonic influence (2009: 6).

Any thorough account of melancholia should also consider Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). This treatise was one of the first encyclopedic studies on this matter

and constitutes an influential work. It was extremely popular at the time of its publishing and according to William H. Gass, in his introduction to the 2001 edition, it "went into six editions during Burton's life time" (Burton 2001: xiv). Having been preceded by Timothie Bright and his *Treatise of Melancholy* (1586), Burton's harkens back to the humoural Hippocratic-Galenic tradition, tracing the lineaments of the melancholy disposition and even offering some misogyny-laden insights into the gendered manifestations of this distempered mood. In this sense, Radden points out:

> Burton distinguishes the melancholy undergone by women from that of men, relating women's suffering to "those vicious vapours" that come from menstrual blood. His account of the suffering of women, and his prescription from its cure ("to see them well-placed, and married to good husbands in due time") is dealt with cursorily. It shows, in the words of one commentator, "Burton's stereotype of woman and her ailments: woman is undisciplined and her ailments stem from this lack of regulation and the hazards associated with her sexuality" (Sulkans: 1989: 80). Its misogyny aside, Burton's rambling, eclectic and ebullient *Anatomy* remains the most enduring and endearing among English works on melancholy (2000: 130-131).

Burton also recognized that melancholia was open to a myriad of interpretations. His forays into subsets of melancholia such as love-melancholia or religious-melancholia, with chapters devoted to cures or, as he calls them, "remedies against all manner of discontents" (Burton 2001: 126) bear out the extensive purvey of this study. In this sense, Burton acknowledges: "The tower of Babel never yielded such confusion of tongues in this Chaos of Melancholy doth variety of its symptoms" (as quoted by Radden 2009: 99). Although humoural theorization was already becoming obsolete and black bile was taking on the form of a metaphor, Burton's drawing upon it allowed him to distinguish melancholia the disease and melancholia as a universal human disposition, a predicament from which "no man living is free"- being thus "the lot of the humankind" (Radden 2009: 99). Burton carves out a space for melancholia which is not entirely tied to pathology. Moreover, during Burton's lifetime the blurring between melancholia and melancholy lingered on and only at a later period would the distinction between the two concepts be expounded. By positing melancholia as an emotional perturbation and not necessarily a

mental disturbance, tied to pathology, Burton paved the way for further scientific analyses of melancholia, foregrounding subjective moods as cardinal qualities.

Later on, with Emil Kraepelin's work, one witnesses the medicalization of melancholia and its replacement by depression. Subsumed under the term depression, melancholia and its hitherto loosely-bound symptomology was subject to nosological categorization which splintered into different levels of intensity. As this process unraveled, depression became more gender-based, in which the feminine is construed as more likely to be afflicted by depressive states. The inhumane side of the excessive medicalization of mental disturbances can be seen in Milos Forman's *One Flew over a Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) where what might have been perceived in the Galenic tradition as despondency and dejection - which could be easily dealt with by cleansing and purging - is punished by the electrotherapies holding full sway in psychiatric practice. Interestingly, the film bears out Foucault's idea that mental illness is culturally construed and its definition controlled by the state which, therefore, exerts its power by imposing and endorsing nosological categories. As Bell states, following Foucault, psychiatry can entail "a means of policing undesirable elements in society" (5).

One of the most influential works on melancholia is that by Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", first published in 1917. Freud's essay was a breakthrough in the study of melancholia and would come to have a great impact on object-relations theorizations such as those by Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva. By attempting to delve into the psychic dynamics of melancholia, Freud contrasted it with a similar subjective state, that of mourning. According to Freud, both states imply a feeling of loss, but whereas in mourning the subject knows what has been lost and is able to recover from the grief it entails, becoming unhindered from further attachment, in melancholia the lost loved object is more difficult to define and appears shrouded in the uncertainty as to what has been lost. Freud defines the state of melancholia as follows:

> Melancholia is mentally characterized by a profoundly painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love, the inhibition of any kind of performance and a reduction in the sense of self, expressed in self-discrimination

> and self-directed insults, intensifying into the desultory expectation of punishment. We have a better understanding of this when we bear in mind that mourning displays the same traits, apart from one: the disorder of self-esteem is absent (2005: 204).

So, mourning is not perceived as pathological since it has a normative quality, and allows the subject to move forward and work through the mechanics of grief - the work of mourning as Freud calls it. In melancholia, however, the idea of loss appears enmeshed in confusion which hampers any attempt at its explanation. Freud argues that mourning does not strike us as pathological "since we are so easily able to explain it" (204). Moreover, according to Freud the process of mourning is over when the individual is capable of severing the bonds which had attached him/her to the loved object - being thus set free to direct that libidinal energy towards a new object choice. Freud states "reality testing has revealed that the loved object no longer exists and demands that the ego as a whole sever its bonds with that object" (204), adding "In fact the ego is left free and uninhibited once again after the mourning work is completed" (205). In melancholia, the mechanics of loss are far more complex and though Freud recognized that both processes spring from the experience of loss, in melancholia that recognition is accompanied by a tendency to self-reproach, self-disparagement and lack of self-esteem. Freud argues:

> The object may not really have died, for example, but may instead have been lost as a love-object (as, for example, in the case of the abandoned bride). In yet other cases we think that we should cling to our assumption of such a loss, but it is difficult to see what has been lost, so we may rather assume that the patient cannot consciously grasp what he has lost. Indeed, this might also be the case when the loss that is the cause of the melancholia is known to the subject, when he knows *who* it is, but not *what* it is about that person that he has lost. So the obvious thing is for us somehow to relate melancholia to the loss of an object that is withdrawn from consciousness, unlike mourning, in which no aspect of the loss is unconscious (205).

Freud was puzzled by the way melancholic inhibition posited an impoverishment of the ego: whereas in the mourning process it is the world which has become poorer; in the melancholy disposition "an extraordinary reduction in self-esteem" implies a great "impoverishment for the ego" (205) which results in the patient's unabashed displays of grief, functioning paradoxically as a form of validation and legitimization of his tortured

subjectivity. He thus argues: "the patient describes his ego to us as being worthless, incapable of functioning and morally reprehensible, he is filled with self-reproach, he levels insults against himself and expects ostracism and punishment" (206). And yet, inasmuch as he foregrounds Shakespeare's Hamlet as an example of this self-conscious grieving demeanor, Freud has to fall back on the "rich vein of European traditions around melancholia" (Radden 2009: 153). Freud positions himself within a cultural tradition where melancholia is correlated with a certain charisma predicated upon a gendered discourse that values and privileges male loss but dismisses female loss. In this line of thought, Juliana Schiesari underlines how Freud's essay, notwithstanding its innovative breadth, incorporates the Aristotelian romanticization of male suffering (Schiesari: 1992). According to Schiesari, the indefinable nature which Freud ascribes to the love-object, the *what* and not the *who* which has been lost, correlates with a fetishisation of loss itself, since it is the latter which "becomes the dominant feature and not the lost object" (11).

Freud argues that in melancholia there is an unconscious process of introjection of the love object which is incorporated within the ego by a process of narcissistic identification. The introjection of the object choice is unique in all readings of melancholia and bears out the singularity of Freud's contribution to the studies of this condition. Thus, whereas in mourning the subject was capable of detaching him or herself from an investment in a love-object and is set free to establish other ties, in melancholia the object is incorporated into the ego which remains withdrawn into its own fixation. Mari Ruti expounds on this idea, emphasizing that there is a strand of masochism underlying the melancholy mind: "While mourning allows the subject to gradually overcome the grief of loss, melancholia ensues from its inability to complete the process of mourning" (2005: 639) and in the process "clings to the memory of the lost object with the kind of stubborn perseverance that defies the logic of well being" (639). Ruti claims that this fixation in the past can have a negative effect on the subject unless he/she becomes capable of transforming into language - the signifier - the potential creativity that lies at the heart of melancholy inclinations. If that does not happen, the subject becomes entrapped in a cycle of "repetition compulsion and the death drive" (640). Similarly David Eng and Shinhee Han also stress how melancholia does not allow "the gradual letting go" (2000: 670) and fetters the subject to an unassuaged

sense of loss. Interestingly, Eng and Han add that melancholia can be a legitimate psychic process when hegemonic cultures deprive minorities of "ideal affects" (671) and disparage their objects of love which, in the context they analyse, is deeply associated with cultural identity. This offers a larger view of melancholia which transcends individual subjectivity in order to encompass a collective feeling of deprivation and grieving.

Kristeva's views also accord with Ruti's since, for her, melancholia can only be potentially creative inasmuch as the subject is capable of seeing the other as independent of his/her subjectivity. This means entering the world of language, the symbolic, and forfeiting the object of love which is, in Kristeva's formulation, the mother. Only then is the individual capable of loving. As John Lechte observes apropos of Kristeva's theorization in *The Black Sun*:

> If love is a mark of separation and an antidote to despair, melancholia is the failure of a loving self to emerge - the failure of separation. (…) What of the past? The melancholic does not symbolize it, but "lives" it nostalgically as a failed symbolisation or representation. The melancholic is thus caught in a kind of time warp. He/she wants time as such back again and not – as in Proust – the place, or more specifically the objects, which represent and signify it. Once again, the object only appears here - if at all - *in absentia* (Lechte: 1991: 99).

Kristeva claims thus that melancholia is narcissistic, a self-serving form of preservation:

> The melancholy cannibalistic imagination is a repudiation of the loss's reality and of death as well. It manifests the anguish of losing the other through the survival of self, surely a deserted self but not separated from what still and ever nourishes it and becomes transformed into the self - which also resuscitates - through such a devouring (1989: 12).

Freud also explains how the introjection of the lost object into the ego leads to ambivalent feelings:

> For the most part, the causes of melancholia go beyond the clear case of loss through death, and include all the situations of insult, slight, setback and disappointment through which an opposition of love and hate can be introduced to the relationship or an ambivalence already present can be intensified. This conflict of ambivalence, now more real, now more constitutive in origin, should not be neglected among the

> preconditions of melancholia. If the love of the object, which cannot be abandoned while the object itself is abandoned, has fled into narcissistic identification, *hatred goes to work on this substitute object, insulting it, humiliating it, making it suffer and deriving a narcissistic satisfaction from that suffering* (211). (my italics)

This ambivalence regarding the lost loved object, this oscillation between love and hate, has a significant impact on Peckinpah's work, raising a multiplicity of concerns and questions which will be more extensively developed in section six, part three. Drawing on Schiesari's vision *vis-à-vis* Freud's complex essay, we can conclude that insofar as the latter claims that melancholia itself is like "an open wound", which resists the process of closure, he reinforces its unresolved nature which saps the subject's energy and renders him/her incapable of divestment of libidinal attachment. Moreover, by underscoring that the sense of loss is directed at a "what" rather than at a "who", Freud emphasizes loss itself, to the point of fetishizing it. The unhindered display of sorrow or pain as emblematized by Hamlet is a reinforcement of male subjectivity and legitimates its significance in terms of a cultural imaginary whereby melancholia signals masculine exceptionalism. Schiesari states:

> The melancholic ego, in order to authenticate its conflicted relation between *innen* and *unwelt* inner and outer world, is dependent on loss as a means through which it can represent itself. In so doing however, it derealizes and devalues any object of loss for the sake of loss itself: a sort of suturing between lack and loss, an idealization of the loss that paradoxically empowers the ego. Thus the melancholic ego, I argue, refocuses attention not on the lost object but on the loss, on the "what" of the lost object, whose thingness points back to the subject of the loss (not the "whom" that is lost in mourning but the "who" that presents himself as losing in melancholia). Hence, the reason the loss in the melancholic is not clear (is opaque to consciousness) is that it is the condition of loss as loss that is privileged and not the loss of any particular object. Given this privileging of loss over and beyond an object of loss, perhaps the "what" can be understood as nothing more than a repetition of loss itself (42-43).

The undefinable nature of the lost object in Kristeva's rationalization becomes the *thing*, an archaic, primeval and pre-symbolic form of attachment which escapes from the realm of signification. As she argues:

> Ever since that archaic attachment the depressed person has the impression of having been deprived of an unnameable, supreme good, of something

> unrepresentable, that perhaps only devouring might represent, or an invocation might point out but no word could signify. Consequently, for such a person, no erotic object could replace the unreplaceable perception of a place, or pre-object confining the libido or severing the bonds of desire (1989: 13).

This problematizes the subject's entering in the symbolic since the successful overcoming of a melancholic state presupposes killing off the first love-object whose memory lingers in its irrepressible power, that is, the mother as primary recipient of love (Schiesari: 1992). Kristeva enlarges upon Freud's perception of ambivalence towards the introjected object underscoring the attraction/repulsion dynamics which prevail between the subject and what she designates the *thing*:

> My necessary Thing is also and absolutely my enemy, my foil, the delightful focus of my hatred. The Thing falls from me along the outposts of significance where the Word is not yet my Being. A mere nothing, which is a cause, but at the same time a fall, before being an Other, the Thing is the recipient that contains my dejecta, and everything that results from *cadere* (Latin: to fall)- it is a waste with which in my sadness I merge (1989: 15).

Moreover, insofar as he argues that the melancholic displays a capacity to grasp the truth more "keenly than others who are not melancholic" (206), Freud equates melancholia with self-knowledge and self-analysis. He wonders "why one must become ill in order to have access to such truth?" (206). Freud posits the melancholia-ridden subject as more cognizant of reality, which would conform much later with studies that point to "depressive realism" (Bell: 2014) where depressed people are said to be "sadder but wiser" and less prone to being thwarted in their expectations since they always expect the worst (Bell: 157). Whilst the melancholic apparently seems to wallow in low self-esteem and "a loss of interest in the outside world" (204), the bouts of self-recrimination and the attendant pleasure in self-exposure are tantamount to a rebellious attitude. In this vein, Schiesari argues:

> It is therefore only a small step from this interpretation of the melancholic's self-reproaches as a disguised critique of others "on moral grounds" to a romanticized view of the melancholic as the misunderstood and self-abnegating but truthful "moralist" critic of society, in other words, as a disagreeable but justified rebel (50).

Hence the melancholic's keener eye for the truth hinges on an "overdeveloped critical faculty that positions the melancholic as morally superior" (Schiesari: 53). Although Freud does not anchor melancholia in gender, his view resonates with gendered presuppositions. He refers, in passing, to the loss suffered by "the abandoned bride" (205) or to a "well behaved, efficient and dutiful woman" (207) who is more likely to be afflicted by melancholia than a "woman who is very negligent of her household" and therefore "a person about whom we ourselves would be unable to find anything good to say" (207). These words point to a rather limited view of women's grieving when compared with, say, Hamlet's grander musings. Freud defends male suffering as potentially artistic and creative whereas women are mere mourners and dismissed as depressive. Schiesari observes:

> In other words, the distribution of lack and loss in melancholic terms legislates a hierarchy within the interpretation of melancholia that encodes "higher" and "lower" forms of depression. Seen in this way melancholia as a gendered category can subvert women's own claims to loss and difference by making of women a group unable to translate these claims into artistic, philosophical, political or psychological empowerment (55).

Kristeva also associates melancholia with lucidity. She considers that this lucidity is not fruitless and may usher melancholia-afflicted subjects into creative ventures. She states:

> For if it is true that those who are slaves to their moods, beings drowned in their sorrows, reveal a number of cognitive frailties, it is equally true that a diversification of moods, variety in sadness, refinement in sorrow or mourning are the imprint of a human kind that is surely not triumphant but subtle, ready to fight, and creative… (1989: 22).

Although Freud was clear when he used the word "loss" (literally in German *verlust*), as Radden underlined (2009), feminist approaches such as those by Irigaray and Kristeva dwell on the question of lack, capitalizing on Freud's theorization but also appropriating Lacanian distinctions between the imaginary and the symbolic. For these thinkers, women's sexual difference, their "castrated" condition, consigns them to a peripheral position in the signifying economy, to use Irigaray's expression, of discursive apparatuses. Schiesari quotes Irigaray as follows:

> On the other hand, Irigaray has stated that women cannot become melancholic because there is no adequate signifying economy at their disposal. To re-quote Irigaray: "It is not that she lacks some "master signifier" or that none is imposed upon her, but rather *that access to a signifying economy, to the coining of signifiers, is difficult or even impossible for her* because she remains an outsider, herself a subject to their norms" (Schiesari 2009: 74).

Melancholia becomes problematic for women since they are incapable of translating their loss/lack in terms of empowering discourses and are doomed to the devalued, and unglamorous position of mourners or - in the more clinical, 20th century-rooted, behavioral view - the depressed. In a cultural tradition which has given short shrift to women's translation of their loss into artistic expressions, male ruminations are encoded as superior. Bergman's *Persona* (1966) illustrates women's inability to express grief by foregrounding a protagonist that withdraws into complete silence. Her silence is a form of resistance, the extreme embodiment of her discomfort with motherhood, which constitutes a daring subject in a disturbing film. As has been argued, the piecemeal replacement of the term melancholia by depression accompanied the process of medicalization of knowledge and the emphasis on behavioral approaches rather than on subjective ones, which would be more difficult to apprehend and systematize. This shift also shows how the history of medicine, as Radden argues, "suggests that women have long been subject to ideologically colored diagnoses and forms of treatment and these have apparently differed from period to period"(Radden 2009: 69). She also reveals how medical developments oftentimes voiced a skewed, value-laden approach to gender, stating that throughout history "one theme remains constant: "medicine's prime contribution to sexist ideology" (69).

In this sense, apropos of feminist analyses on the subject of melancholia, Schiesari argues:

> Typically when the loser is male, the loss can be idealized into the enabling condition of his individualistic and otherwise inexplicable "genius"; when the loser is female, loss becomes but a contingent circumstance in an essentialized and devalued depression. One task of the feminist analysis of melancholia is precisely to redeem the cause of depression, to give the depression of women the value and dignity traditionally vested in the melancholia of men (93).

Freud's essay was thus a starting point in subsequent analyses of melancholia giving rise to many other strands of theorization, especially those revolving around object-investment such as the one postulated by Melanie Klein. Reinterpreting Freud's concept of ambivalence towards the lost object, Klein proposes the view that every infant experiences a love/hate relation towards the loved object (in this case represented by the first object of emotional investment, the mother) and goes through depressive positions ignited by weaning. As Radden puts it about Kleinian theory:

> This period of infancy involved in every case a kind of infantile neurosis, similar to melancholia. It was, as she put it, melancholia in *status nascendi*, which she called the depressive position, a stage she believed, that must be recognized as central to the child's development. The distress and sense of loss experienced by the infant in the depressive position is relived and reenacted with the occurrence of many adult neuroses, not only melancholia but also manic depressive, obsessive and paranoid conditions (2000: 298).

"Mourning and Melancholia" was pivotal in approaching the term melancholia. The central idea of loss, the introjection of the lost object through a process of narcissistic identification and the attendant ambivalent position regarding that same object constituted hitherto unformulated conceptualizations.

Although depression seems to have gained prominence in relation to melancholia, more recent analyses have tried to retrieve melancholia, calling into question the reductive scope of the new term. In this sense, the old term melancholia in its all-encompassing dimension - the blurring of lines between normal and abnormal, the intersection of body and mind, the complexity of moods and miens - seem to strike a chord when one attempts to understand the ebbs and flows of human subjectivity and emotional states. As Bell questions: "How do we explain this continuing interest, both cultural and scientific, in an idea that seems to have passed into obsolescence a hundred years ago?"(2). According to Bell, melancholia bespeaks the Western interest in self-consciousness, the espousal of and infatuation with an introspective, self-focused stance which probes the realms of subjectivity. He argues:

> Self-consciousness is a defining feature of Western culture and melancholia has played an important role in shaping and giving expression to the way we are conscious of ourselves. One need only, consider the large quantity (and high quality) of melancholy art, music and especially literature in the West. Like autistic savant behavior, these cultural expressions are hard to explain if melancholy cognition is understood merely as a deficit (30).

In this way melancholia is divested of its negative implications but can be part and parcel of a cultural milieu which defines itself through attention to the self. Bell posits rumination as an essential proclivity manifested in melancholy states. He argues that ruminative stances entail the idea of self-attention and, as such, "it should not be characterized as a deficit or lack of cognitive effort (Indeed rumination might arguably be better characterized as an excess of cognitive effort in a particular direction)" (29). He argues that melancholy cognition should not be seen as a lack but as a "style" (29). Radden also says: "All pain involves affect" (2009: 111) and the recent scholarly emphasis on melancholia testifies to the way depression fails to explore the psychic complexity entailed by the universally felt experience of loss. This brings to mind great melancholic artists such as Virginia Woolf whose work is fraught with a sense of loss and with an obsessive attention to introspective moods. Ester Sánchez Pardo, analyzing Woolf's modernist stance, argues that "melancholia is an epochal sign in modernism" (2003: 215), and establishing some connections between Woolf and the painter Magritte, Pardo elaborates on both artists' concern with form as a means to translate internal states of mind. The traumatic parental loss - Woolf's mother died when she was thirteen and Magritte's mother committed suicide - engendered a melancholy feeling - which Pardo analyses in the light of Melanie Klein's theorization on melancholia - imparting a psychological complexity and depth to their *oeuvre*.

Dariel Leader defends the need to refashion melancholia and mourning as the "new black", an allusion to the ancient humoral descriptions of melancholia and the black bile. In Leader's view, the excessive medicalization of suffering has rendered subjects helpless in understanding their own losses and expunged significance from human emotional responses. In this way, Leader criticizes the trivialization of depression and lays claim to a rehabilitation of Freudian concepts of mourning and melancholia as befitting the self-consciousness that Bell correlates with contemporary western cultures. He states:

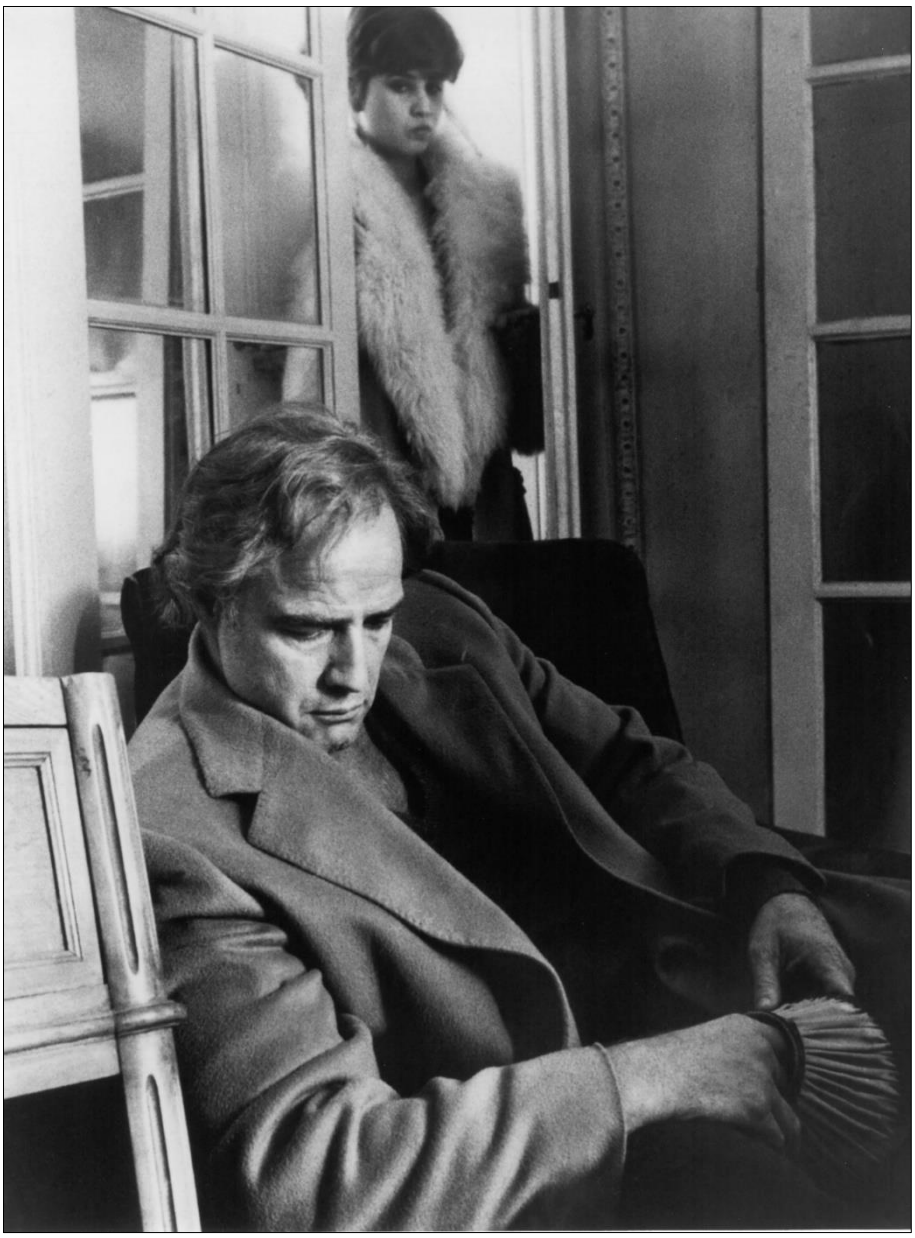
> Modern Western societies have increasingly bought into the concept of depression over the last thirty years, yet with little real justification. The fact that the diagnosis has achieved such dominance demands explanation. The more that the idea of depression is used uncritically, and human responses to loss become reduced to biochemical problems, the less space there is to explore the intricate structures of mourning and melancholia that had so fascinated Freud. I will argue that these concepts need to be revived, and that the idea of depression should be used as a descriptive term to refer to surface features of behavior (2009: 7).

More recent interests in melancholia have attempted to retrieve the wellsprings of its creative potential and have construed it as a mood which is capable of being transformative and life- affirming, superseding the traditional images of inaction and dejection with which it has been associated. In this line of thought, Flatley also argues that melancholia is part of the modern paradigm, as this latter involves an unassuaged sense of loss. Modernity is predicated on a sense of temporality that continually establishes its difference from the past and thus from what has been lost. Flatley argues:

> In fact, it may be that modernity signals nothing more or less than the impulse to declare the difference of a present moment in respect to the moments that preceded it, to perceive the specificity and difference of one's historical moment (29).

What Flatley postulates, also drawing upon a Freudian legacy, is that dealing with loss is an integral part of human existence, a constitutive aspect in the process of identity construction and thus it should be grappled with either through mourning or through melancholia.

The history of melancholia is thus a slow, checkered process which has only been surveyed in this exploratory analysis. Thus, turning to film representation, we can see some of these ideas borne out. In Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), Marlon Brando's Paul sitting next to his wife's corpse berates her for her unfaithfulness and unwarranted suicide. Throughout the film in his brooding Method acting style, Brando articulates the glamorized inflections that a masculine melancholy stance can exude. Bertolucci's film constitutes a striking illustration of how melancholia operates as an element of mysterious appeal when it is articulated with physiognomy, as Klibansky *et al* attempted to prove.



15. Marlon Brando as the brooding Paul in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*: the quintessential melancholy hero shrouded in mystery, melancholia and glamorized grief.

In contrast, in John Cassavettes's *A Woman under the Influence* (1974), the female character's emotional disorder is construed as a depressive state which is disruptive of family and social relations. Her deranged state of mind becomes less a glamorous trait than a nuisance, a female affliction which should be overcome. This hints at the way melancholia has been culturally gendered, operating as an empowering trope in constructions of masculine images, while being seen as a belittling ailment in women. Thus, whilst

depression is "feminine", melancholy has been aligned with an intellectually-inspired masculinity, its aesthetic implications underscored by this distinction. Interestingly, a film like *Bright Star* (Jane Campion, 2009), which centers on the romantic attachment between John Keats (a profoundly melancholy artist) and Fanny Brawne, tries to capture loss in the feminine and the film ends with the onset of the work of mourning of its protagonist, facing the death of her object of love (Keats). More than dwelling on Keats's melancholy disposition, the film revolves around Fanny whose skills as a seamstress and clothes designer are seen as a projection of her creativity set against Keats's inability to make a living out of his own poetry. The film teases the image of the melancholic man as the brooding intellectual ("by musings you mean "common thoughts?" mocks Fanny) by foregrounding a woman who displays an innate sense of style but who has been denied access to the privileged artistic world of the intellectually gifted male. No wonder then that feminist readings of melancholia have concentrated on women's lack and on their displacement from the symbolic structures which support phallocentric discourses. Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011) draws upon the image of the depressed woman whose instability and profound dejection point to this culturally entrenched notion, that depression is more ostensibly felt in the female. The film never mentions depression as the ailment afflicting the main character, Justine (Kirsten Dunst), but displaces onto the planet Melancholia, en route to collide with Earth, the enigmatic lunar waxing and waning that the term has always implied. In a related vein, Wim Wenders's *Paris Texas* (1984) centers on the melancholy male and, whilst it deals with the rifts and schisms that have estranged a couple causing their separation, the final narration of events, and attendant reconstruction of the past, is given from Travis (Harry Dean Stanton)'s point of view. The glass wall of the peep-show room, from which he can see his erstwhile wife but she cannot see him operates as the symbolic projection of his solipsistic pain. Suffice it to say, the striking initial scenes, in which he appears roaming trance-like, cut adrift from all social connections, posit his regression into a non-verbal, narcissistic inarticulacy which hints at profound loss. Tellingly, the film is also touched by Western-evoking nostalgia not only through the casting of Harry Dean Stanton, who had appeared in secondary roles in films

such as Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* or Penn's *The Missouri Breaks,* but also through the character's attire, his cowboy boots and Stetson hat.

The intention is to go on and show how melancholia has held such a tantalizing aesthetic allure in the Western genre and in particular in Peckinpah's work in its articulation and dramatization of male grief. I will argue then that melancholia is thus the often projected mood of the Western genre in the 60s and 70s, resulting from its flirtation with loss. Suffice it to say, we are dealing with a genre that had lost its own appeal for contemporary audiences and that could only refashion itself through nostalgia and longing. The decline of the genre is in itself a closure that suggests that the mythology on which it relied has been replaced by a more detached and even self-disparaging one, as can be seen in films like *Cat Ballou* (Elliott Silverstein, 1965), *Support your Local Sheriff* (Burt Kennedy, 1969) and *Blazing Saddles* (Mel Brooks, 1974). Here, the debunking of Western tropes is meant to disavow the melancholy grieving of a moribund form, but the laughter it elicits may signify no more than the temporary exhaustion of the genre. After all, many of Eastwood's Westerns were made after these spoofs. I believe the Western is at its best when associated with melancholy yearning since, from its very beginning, it has always been imbued with longing and conjured the craving for an unnamed "what".

V- Melancholia in the Western genre: of sadness and grief with a cause

"I am a stranger here myself…"
Johnny Guitar (Sterling Hayden) in Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (1954)

When William Munny in *Unforgiven* recovers his cold-blooded, old self there is a reprisal of a familiar idea of retributive justice which, in the Western, flouts the law. In this sense, Gene Hackman's Little Bill "had it coming" in the moral ethos that underlies so many Western narratives. While Munny in the recovering of the unswerving strength that characterizes Western heroes, growls bitterly "deserve has nothing to do with it", dispatching Little Bill with a shot to the head, we know that "deserve" has everything to do with it. Being a revisionist Western, reinterpreting the fondest tropes of the genre, *Unforgiven* is rife with a melancholia centered on the gunfighter's mystique.The genre has always explored issues of male adequacy, the legitimacy of violence and the strained relations between individualism and community, wilderness and civilization. As Michael Coyne states:

> Westerns were ideologically seductive, and not simply with regard to constructions of white male primacy. Just as Frederic Jackson Turner defined the frontier as "a gate of escape from the bondage of the past", Hollywood westerns have furnished spiritual respite from the complexities of twentieth century society, simultaneously, soothing, feeding and thriving on romantic frustrations (1997: 2-3).

This underlying regression into the past, the equating of progress with burgeoning materialism and inauthenticity underpins the Western codes which tend to focus, to use Coyne's words "on dreams frustrated and dreams fulfilled in virtually equal measure" (4). Through the figure of the taciturn, lonely hero who both takes pleasure in and grieves over his displacement from the social order, Westerns are infused with a melancholy that evokes the sadness and grief without cause bound up with the melancholiac's disposition. From lawmen rankled by poignant memories of their past like the mythical Wyatt Earp and his self-destructive buddy Doc Holliday[33] - who is as good at shooting as he is at linguistic

[33] In films like *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford, 1946)), *Gunfight at The Ok Corral* (John Sturges, 1957) or the more recent *Tombstone* (George P. Cosmatos, 1993), *Wyatt Earp* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1994).

niceties - to doomed outlaws like Jesse James,[34] Jimmy Ringo[35] or Billy the Kid,[36] the genre constantly romanticizes a wounded masculinity.

Thus, one can say that the Western positions itself within a tradition where masculinity is to some extent reinforced through the aesthetic appeal of male melancholia. Nowhere is this melancholia more strongly felt than in *Shane* (George Stevens, 1953), a film which Peckinpah deeply admired and which he claimed to be one of the few films which treated violence in a mature way. *Shane* crystallizes a range of thematic concerns which recur in many Western narratives. The often-told tale of rapacious landowners who lay claim to the land, irrespective of homesteaders' endeavors to make a living, is part of the populist ideology that underlies the genre. The survival of small farmers is constantly endangered by corporate powers. Accordingly, it is in this context that Shane appears out of nowhere, having been "one place or another", going "somewhere he has never been", in an existential rootlessness which is part of his mysterious allure. As Richard Slotkin states, contrasting the figure of the gunfighter to that of the outlaw:

> *Jesse James* spends most of its narrative describing and analyzing the outlaw's response to oppression and injustice and relates those concerns to the life of the outlaw's community, showing how Jesse emerges from the heart of that community, serves it, then goes too far and is cast out of it. The hero of *Shane* is also a skilled fighter who assists small farmers against a tyrannical proprietor. But Shane arrives from outside, and his past is concealed. His motives for helping the farmers are chivalric and romantic, he is the only character in the movie who never acts (or hesitates to act) from self-interested motives. But because Shane's motives for helping the farmers are unique and arise from no visible history or social background, they appear to be expressions of his nature, signs of a nobility which is independent of history, like the attributes of a "higher race" (400).

This glamorized image is aestheticized by his almost pristine deportment: his fringed buckskins and six-shooters, his quiet, introspective stance are constantly pitted against the

[34] *Jesse James* (Henry King, 1939), *The True Story of Jesse James* (Nicholas Ray, 1957), *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid* (Philip Kaufman, 1972) or *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Andrew Dominik, 2007). The last two revising the myth and presenting Jesse James as violent and unreliable.
[35] *The Gunfighter* (Henry King, 1950). *Tombstone* also features Ringo played by Michael Biehn.
[36] In Howard Hughes's *The Outlaw* (1943), Arthur Penn's *The Left Handed Gun* (1958), Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973)

drab, prosaic figure of Starrett (Van Heflin) the homesteader who, together with his wife Marion, tries to make a decent living off the land, but who is constantly bullied by Ryker and his thugs. Not surprisingly, Van Heflin appears again as Dan, a downtrodden, hardworking rancher in Delmer Daves's *3:10 to Yuma* (1957). His masculinity is bound up with decency and the struggles of a laboring life but his shortcomings as both a farmer and a husband throw into question his confidence and assurance and he desperately attempts to prove himself to his wife. His manhood is contrasted with the beguiling outlaw Ben Wade, played by Glenn Ford. Interestingly, in the 2007 remake of the film, James Mangold explored even further the deep-seated differences between the two men, but this time shifting the focus of attention from the wife to the son, as befits post-9/11 attempts to restore father-figures. Reconfiguring Dan as a man striving to reconquer his son's admiration and heal the fissures which threaten his image as a father, Mangold underlines the need to reinforce patriarchal hegemony in the form of heroic action. And yet, despite foregrounding Dan's hardship and angst-riven life, Mangold - like Daves had done in 1957 - dwells on Ben Wade's manipulative charm, his artistic, creative side - after a romantic encounter with a saloon girl, an old acquaintance from his past, he is seen drawing a sketch of her naked body and because of that distracting moment he is caught by the law - and the sense of loss since he had been abandoned by his mother at an early age. "Even bad guys love their moms!" he whimsically mentions. Even more than Shane, Wade's melancholia is tied up with intellectual brilliance and exceptionally creative skills. In this sense, Carol A. MacCurdy argues about this remake:

> In short, Ben Wade epitomizes hypermasculinity. Because his fast draw and murderous skills come so easily, Wade would rather dominate the world before him with his quick-witted intelligence, seductive charm and poetic use of language. Just as he captures beauty in a drawing, he traps others who interest him through his hypnotic charm and his mind games. He romances women, both the saloon girl and Dan's wife, with his poetic imagery and ability to see their needs. He effectively and disarmingly seduces them with talk of "green eyes" and "colours of the sea" (2009: 284).

In a related vein, concentrating on the appeal of the outlaw/social bandit in the popular imagination, James A. Buccellato argues that they encapsulate a "political sign capable of

challenging liberal boundaries" (2012: 272) and in that sense they capture support acquiring a symbolic value in the uneven distribution of economic power. Buccellato states: "In other words, at least someone is striking back at the power structure responsible for producing economic hardship. Economic antagonism is thus at the core of the outlaw signifier's political meaning" (279). This rebelliousness increases the mystique around these figures and justifies acts of violence. Interestingly, in a more recent example of the revisionist western, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, by Andrew Dominik (2007), Jesse James is portrayed as a brooding figure introduced in a voice-over narration that nostalgically evokes his contradictions, as evinced by the domesticity and wildness he incorporates. He is often seen silhouetted against the wide horizon, or sitting musing in his rocking chair. The narrative turns on the doomed figure of the outlaw trapped in its own myth (like Ringo) and on the sycophantic hero-worshipping of young devotees like the Schofield Kid in *Unforgiven*. Jim Kitses wrote in an article for *Sight and Sound* at the time of the film's release:

> In our first glimpse of Jesse he's in a characteristic pose, seated motionless in a rocker. Though a sign of his increasingly domesticated existence, such images are complicated by Brad Pitt's expression and posture, which give the character the aloof and the commanding air of royalty: we sense why underlings vie for his favour, why the new-comer Ford brothers aspire to serve him and why the callow Bob yearns for "sidekick" status (2007: 16).

Despite the tarnished morality of these melancholy bandits, they suggest a powerful magnetism which downplays their propensity for violence and their pleasure in killing. As Schiesari argued, when she explained how the Freudian melancholiac affirms his moral superiority, while appearing to criticize or deride himself, he is really disparaging others. The figure of the gunfighter or the outlaw is the embodiment of that same ambivalent position: reproaching himself but asserting moral judgment in relation to others.

Shane's appeal is reinforced by the gaze of others like Starrett's wife, for whom Shane becomes an object of erotic desire and young Joey who is enthralled by Shane's mystique and his fast draw. Shane's brooding silences, his controlled demeanor, are a stylistic correlative of his profound melancholy. As Warshow observed, the Westerner is the

embodiment of “a figure of repose” and that repose is registered by the control he exerts over his own ability to kill. Unlike the boasting bravado of Elisha Cook Jr’s Stonewall, who like so many diminished male figures in the genre, strive for assertion but die ingloriously at the hands of skilled and more mature gunfighters, Shane’s assurance does not need to be asserted. He can ask for a soda in a saloon, endure the jeering and leave graciously and the sense we get is one of restraint, not of cowardice. He is a “man apart”, to draw on Nicholls’s description of Scorsese’s melancholic males, but it is the idea of a violent past, gnawing at a tortured subjectivity, that lies at the heart of his melancholy brooding.

16. Alan Ladd as Shane, epitomizing the aesthetic glamorized vision of the gun-fighter.

The Western posits the expression of violence as the *raison d'être* for the male heroes' stoic suffering. One realizes that their past is beset by violent moments where the memory of killing is often represented as spiritually corrosive. In this sense, Shane tells Marion "There is no living with a killing….right or wrong, it's a brand and the brand sticks. There's no going back." Robert Warshow states about the melancholy hero: "This mature sense of limitation and unavoidable guilt is what gives the westerner a "right" to his melancholy" (1998: 40). Shane is akin to Jimmy Ringo in *The Gunfighter* (Henry King, 1950) since both are tethered to their own violent pasts. Their competence at killing binds them to a life of loneliness, bereft of family or social ties. Hence, Shane's longing glances at the Starrett couple, as they epitomize everything he cannot possibly have, or Ringo's aborted attempt to rejoin his wife and kid and start afresh somewhere else, a possibility which is constantly ruled out by the burden of a fame that precedes him. Significantly, most of the action in the film develops indoors, inside the saloon or at the marshal's office, highlighting, through Ringo's spatial confinement, his own psychological entrapment. Warshow's words are compelling when he compares Alan Ladd to Gregory Peck in *The Gunfighter* or to Gary Cooper in *High Noon*:

> Actors like Gary Cooper or Gregory Peck are in themselves, as material objects, "realistic", seeming to bear in their bodies and their faces mortality, limitation, the knowledge of good and evil. Ladd is more an "aesthetic object", with some of the "universality" of a piece of sculpture, his special quality is in his physical smoothness and serenity, unworldly and yet not innocent, but suggesting that no experience can really touch him (1998: 45).

By rendering Shane a figure of fantasy and desire, he becomes the ultimate embodiment of phallic narcissism. Like William Munny, whose attempts to be a "common man" are nothing but self-deception induced by the moral teachings of his "dear departed" wife, Shane's interlude at the homesteaders' community is but a brief lull which heightens the melancholy recognition that he has no entitlement to such a rooted existence. The need to set things straight for both will trigger the return to violence and their necessary eviction from the social world. As melancholy wanderers they never settle down. The difference is that Munny is ageing; his melancholy becomes even more painful as it stems from the self-conscious recognition that his feeble body hinders the deployment of masculine

unassailability. The idea of age is emphasised by the genre's association of maturity with wisdom, sometimes articulating an image of manhood wrought out of experience and grief - one may recall John Wayne's Captain Nathan Brittles in Ford's *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, who kneels down at his wife's grave and unburdens himself of anxiety by facing his retirement fears - at other times featuring the cantankerous, old-timers who function as comic sidekicks contrasting with the heroes' taciturnity. In fact, as Edward Buscombe argues, "the term *old-timer* features in the Western's generic conventions and a 'whole troop of actors' make a living specializing in this one part; indeed the Western devised the phrase 'old-timer', its own terms for the role" (1996: 197). Notwithstanding the genre's rendering of age as a positive trait, often set against insecure males that need to go through a severe testing to shed their naïve bravado, there is a difference between Brennan's garrulity (his nagging disposition in Hawks's *Rio Bravo*) and the impairing, enervated age that ails heroes like Munny and before him Peckinpah's protagonists. In these latter examples, there is a sense of loss of male power, a nostalgic longing for a body which still can measure up.

The influence of a *noirish* mood in the late fifties and the popularity of psychoanalytical theories had some impact on the genre, becoming revealing in Arthur Penn's *The Left Handed Gun* (1958) where the relationship between Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid is informed by Oedipal undertones. Paul Newman plays his role as Billy with a psychological depth drawing on the Method acting style and the way it proposed a more introspective idea of character. The same brooding, melancholy style can be seen in *One Eyed Jacks* (1961) where again Brando's Method-based performance relies upon the projection of emotional states problematizing the effectiveness of action in an otherwise typical narrative of retribution. The probing of the Western hero's psychology is also dealt with in Raoul Walsh's *Pursued*[37] (1947) where Robert Mitchum's Jeb Rand is haunted by loose, fragmented recollections of traumatic past events hindering his own sense of identity and suggesting ontological damage. Suffice it to say, James Stewart's roles in Anthony Mann's westerns also represented a departure from the traditional strong, silent type by

[37] Andrew Britton argues that "The main concern and emphasis in *Pursued* (Raoul Walsh, 1947) might be described as the social determination of neurosis" (1996: 196)

foregrounding anxiety-ridden protagonists. These examples show how the Western also attempted to accommodate difference, de-familiarizing conventional tropes and inflecting masculinity with greater psychic fragility.

Richard Whiteball observes how the genre started to incorporate different trends and moods, departing from its simple formulaic premises to beget a more existentialist, melancholy cowboy:

> For years the western was short, tense, economical, pared down to essentials as it presented its moral fables in terms of the action, the fights, the chases, the final showdown in the dust and heat of noon on main street. The world divided automatically into good and bad, and no man who rode a white horse could be a villain. Even then, although he refused to philosophize about it, a hero had to make his decisions within a rigid code of honour. These things were expected, and the Western concerned itself with how it would be done, but at the beginning of the fifties the "how" changed to "why", a saddle-weary genre was revitalized (1966-1967:14-15).

The melancholia sets in when mourning is left unaccomplished and in these aging heroes there is a lingering desire that phallic power be still within reach and not been curtailed by physical decay. In Don Siegel's *The Shootist* (1976), the hero's age and his bodily failure is brought into focus since both the character, a famous gunfighter, and John Wayne, the larger-than-life star, are dying of cancer. The film reveals a melancholy longing for what Wayne had stood for and J.B. Brooks, the character he plays, is an anachronistic embodiment of the old values of the West which do not fit in the refashioned landscape of automobiles and urban life. "Get out of the way, old man" is the derisive remark Brooks hears from an impatient driver. The film is Wayne's swan-song to the Western. Here Wayne's Brooks prefers to be a target for the hotheaded young guns, - the "young squirts, loudmouth bar-room loafers trying to make a name for themselves", as Ringo calls them in *The Gunfighter* - eager for recognition and fame, rather than face the physical decay that his disease entails, so he stages his own death.The sense of his obsolescence is offset by the quiet, solemn dignity with which he faces his last months of life and by the cluster of values he hands down to the young Gillom, played by Ron Howard. Unlike the moral ambivalence that taints Peckinpah's heroes, Brooks commits to a moral mantra: "I won't

be wronged, I won't be insulted, and I won't be laid a hand on. I don't do these things to other people, and I require the same from them". Importantly, in its elegiac tone, the film projects the idea that the myth of the "beneficent gun" (Wills: 301) still holds sway in the disturbing ideology and jaded cynicism of 70s America, something which was certainly not endorsed by Sam Peckinpah himself. In *The Shootist*, the gunfighter mystique is reconfigured to align age and wisdom, experience and timeless grandeur, thus legitimizing melancholia as a pertinent feature of manhood.

Because Shane represents gun-fighting invincibility and honor, he has epitomized a set of traits which have become so aestheticized that they approach the mythic disembodied. Clint Eastwood draws upon this ethereal quality in *Pale Rider* (1985), which substitutes miners for farmers, a female teenager's sexual awakening for the young boy's enthralled imagination and the ghostlike quality of an inspiring preacher cum relentless avenger for the gunfighter's pristine figure. From the squint-eyed, cigarillo-chewing Man with No Name, in Leone's dollar trilogy, a figure of "stark elusiveness" (Mitchell: 233) whose *sang froid* and lack of expression contrast with the emotional flamboyance of villain Gian Maria Volonté, Eastwood burst onto the scene with a masculinity that capitalizes on the indomitable power of the Westerner but he incorporates elements of physical frailty and ageing that turn him into a more melancholy figure. In Don Siegel's *Coogan's Bluff* (1968) the same persona moves from the Western scenario to the urban New York, his rugged individualism critiquing a modern justice system made weak and emasculated.

17. William Munny (Clint Eastwood) finally coming to himself, in one last hurrah before disappearing in the film's enigmatic ending.

Although the Western strove so forcefully to project this idea of unconstrained male power, there is an underlying acknowledgment that this construction was based upon a fantasy that separates manhood from the unadventurous realm of homesteading. This fantasy becomes the lost loved object which the genre is not capable of mourning, incorporating it and translating its "shadow" - to use Freud's appealing expression - into melancholia. No wonder *Heaven's Gate*, (Michael Cimino 1980), the alleged valediction to the genre, is awash in despair, loss and melancholia. Here there is no Shane with miraculous, chivalric powers to save the homesteaders - representative of the millions of immigrants that flooded westward in search of literally - promised land - but who fall prey to the predatory practices of the Stockgrowers' Association, headed by the greedy Frank Canton (Sam

Waterston) whose interests echo those of Governor Wallace when he speaks on behalf of powerful landowners like Chisum in Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid.*

The film bitterly posits rugged individualism as a dangerous and fallacious construction, serving only to feed the imagination of young boys like Joey in *Shane* or William, Dan's son in *3:10 to Yuma* (2007). Corporate power is destructive and engulfs any one that gets in its way. The film's ending is thus a statement of defeat: many years after the events that make up the narrative - the Johnson County wars - Averill (Kris Kristofferson) now a wealthy man bound to a privileged class, despite his brief but doomed commitment to the immigrants' struggles, is seen on board a yacht accompanied by a sickly woman who, lying recumbent on a chaise longue, asks him for a cigarette. Her indolent, neurasthenic behavior contrasts with all the struggling, immigrant and homesteading women he had met in his past as Johnson County's marshal and his dejected, expression exudes a melancholia which bespeaks broken dreams and the impossibility of retrieving the hopes of his youth (hopes which the film had also spent an extravagant amount of time showing in its opening 20 minute sequence). "I hate getting old" he bitterly remarks while he looks at an old photograph of himself, accompanied by a young unknown woman. Averill, as played by Kristofferson, is no longer the embodiment of the Kid's unfettered freedom but is rather beset by Garrett's disillusionment, an emasculated figure pandering to the whims of a female socialite. He is cut off from the empowering myth and, horror of horrors for a cowboy, on a yacht.

Heaven's Gate's studio-destroying failure at the box-office may be explained by Cimino's challenging deconstruction of Western myths, the de-familiarization of its beloved tropes and the failure to reach an audience already detached from Western premises, but even more so when they appear as mixture of extravagant set pieces - such as the protracted ball and skating scenes - and the unintelligible ramblings of Eastern immigrants in their own languages. Cimino's film tries to take myth to history and ends up pleasing no one. Its failure might suggest how the genre on the historic threshold of the conservative 80s no longer held sway. A film like *Silverado* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1985) is the 80s idea of a Western, emptied out of all its symbolic breadth. The generic and iconic features of the film are

paraded in a kind of energetic pastiche but, to all the participants, it is a dressing-up game. Not even his detractors could claim that of Peckinpah's Westerns.

While in *Shane* the social order is reinforced and Manifest Destiny is retained as the ideological underpinning of American frontier mythology, in *Heaven's Gate* these possibilities are foreclosed by the reinforcement of class disparities and the incapacity of individual or collective, proletarian action to match the violent action of capitalist avarice. Ford had already suggested this outcome when he declared Tom Doniphon's rugged individualism an obsolescence, giving way to the progressive liberalism epitomized by the "pilgrim" Ranse Stoddart and his heart-felt belief in the law and in the community. But in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* the dream of an all-inclusive society is still cherished and sustained despite the nostalgic backward glances at Wayne's anachronistic glamour. Shane must ride away as he is a fantasy figure grounded in the mythic construction of the West. The ending of *How the West Was Won* (John Ford, Henry Hathaway, 1962) offers the liberal, progressive view of the drive westward, as we see the frontier landscape morphing into the modern maze of intersecting Los Angeles highways. Interestingly, in *Lonely Are the Brave* (David Miller, 1962), when the main protagonist, Jake, played by Kirk Douglas, attempts to ride away on his horse, he is ironically run over by a truck on a bustling, car-jammed highway. As Pat Garrett bitterly recognizes, "Times have changed!"

VI- Melancholia in the films of Sam Peckinpah: of musing and grieving heroes

> "Within depression, if my existence is on the verge of collapsing, its lack of meaning is not tragic - it appears obvious to me, glaring and inescapable."
> Julia Kristeva in *Black Sun, Depression and Melancholia* (1989: 3)

Julia Kristeva's description of the "black sun", looming over human existence, seems apposite in relation to Peckinpah's work and even the way it suggests a self-destructive, suicidal drive:

> An avenging death or a liberating death, it is henceforth the inner threshold of my despondency, the impossible meaning of a life whose burden constantly seems unbearable save for those moments when I pull myself together and face up to the disaster (1989: 4).

Peckinpah's melancholy vision can gradually be perceived through a growing disappointment with power structures which encroach on his protagonists, narrowing their choices. Thus, they roam adrift in a world from which they feel estranged. And yet, all Peckinpah's heroes attempt in one way or another to "pull themselves together" even to face up to the disaster. Terence Butler observes:

> Ford's heroes usually have memories of the past to console them when life becomes difficult, but Peckinpah's do not even have this: when they muse about the past, it is to speak of friends who have ended up dying shabbily, deceived and betrayed by the world (25).

Accordingly, Peckinpah's work is elegiac belying the assumption that his films celebrate violence rather than expose its destructive effects. Melancholia suffuses Peckinpah's films, endowing them with an autumnal, bereaving quality. It is one of the great strengths of his work, perhaps a puzzling trait in a director who has been mostly remembered - and chastised - for his pleasure in violent set-pieces.

This sadness lies at the heart of his narratives of loss. Peckinpah goes beyond the long-standing characterization of the gunfighter as a taciturn, melancholy figure. The aesthetic allure which the gunfighter emblematized is not a salient feature in the images of

masculinity he constructed. His heroes are too corporeal and oftentimes come up against insurmountable obstacles which render their actions hopeless. Thus, they do not embody the strong, silent type as epitomized by Randolph Scott in the Westerns he made for director Budd Boetticher. Peckinpah's protagonists discuss their expectations, laugh at their failures and rail against their destiny. Like Martin Scorsese's gangster heroes, their incessant ramblings exorcise fears, establish connections, reinforce or sever male bonding. In a Freudian vein, these male heroes often disparage themselves, indulge in self-criticism exposing "an insistent talkativeness, taking satisfaction from self-exposure" (Freud 2005: 207).

His notoriety as a difficult director to subordinates and his endless bickering with producers might have led him to reify his identification with the outlaw figure. Although Peckinpah's *oeuvre* cannot be limited to the Western, the elegiac, autumnal quality that his Western films so strongly project point to the way he felt at home with the genre's staples and iconography. Moreover, a recognition of its fall from grace with both film and TV audiences informs his work, giving his films an undertone of nostalgia. The travails of friendship and the impossibility of sustaining male camaraderie in a world threatened by materialistic values is a recurrent theme, in *Ride the High Country*, *The Wild Bunch*, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* or even in the action-driven conspiracy movie, *The Killer Elite*.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, a certain melancholy is etched in the Western's own tonality and this chimes in well with the self-reflexive stance the genre projected as it became more revisionist. In Peckinpah it also stems from his personal flirtation with violence and the way he equivocates on its role, as a source of fascination and repulsion, aesthetic stylization and moral diminishment. Prince sums this up:

> The melancholia has many sources that account, in part, for its power. It inheres in the genre of the Western, forever focused upon the vanishing of the West, a lament for the loss of a frontier whose passing has left the modern era immeasurably poorer. Peckinpah was drawn to stories of losers, outcasts and misfits and he was troubled by the loss of his grandfather's ranch: "I grew up on a ranch. But the world is gone… I feel rootless, completely. It's disturbing, very much so. But there's nothing you can do about it, nothing". *The Western's culturally coded melancholy suited Peckinpah's personal sense of rootlessness, isolation and disenchantment with the twentieth-*

> *century, as well as serving as focus for his reveries for a lost boyhood on Peckinpah mountain and the Denver Church Ranch* (119-120). (my italics)

Peckinpah once declared enigmatically "I have never made a Western. I have made a lot of films about men on horseback" (as quoted by Seydor 1997: 51). While this seems to suggest some distance from the traditional forms and functions of the genre and the way it might be conceived in terms of oppositional terms - as Will Wright[38] has attempted to prove by breaking down the genre into opposites - Peckinpah's attraction to the genre is deeply ingrained in his own vision of the world. Whilst recognizing the long-standing code of manhood which has always surfaced in his predecessors, like John Ford, Howard Hawks or Budd Boetticher, Peckinpah expanded on this code, worked variations on it, but always surrendered to its overriding power. Peckinpah's heroes often evoke Anthony Mann's tormented protagonists, especially the James Stewart's characters in *Winchester 73* (1950), *Bend of the River* (1952), *The Far Country* (1954) or The *Man from Laramie* (1955). Of all the directors whose best work falls in this genre, Mann seems to be the one who is more akin to Peckinpah in the way he constructed masculinity as deeply troubled, angst-ridden and often marked by failure. Andre Bazin observes about Anthony Mann's work:

> We owe the most beautifully true westerns of recent years to him. Indeed, the author of *The Naked Spur* is probably the one postwar American director who seems to have specialized in a field into which others have made only sporadic incursions. In any case, each of Mann's films reveals a touching frankness of attitude towards the Western, an effortless sincerity to get inside its themes and there bring to life appealing characters and to invent captivating situations (2005: 156).

In Mann's The *Naked Spur* (1953) Howard Kemp is a relentless bounty hunter, unswerving in his intent to capture the cunning Robert Ryan's Ben (an atypically deceitful role for a usually agreeable Ryan). In the end Kemp, refusing to give up on Ben's dead body and the reward money, is finally forced into recognizing his own greed by a waifish Janet Leigh and breaks down crying, a rare sight in a genre that has always privileged restraint. His perverse

[38] In *Six-Guns & Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (1975), Wright sets out to analyze the oppositions which structure the genre's main underlying tropes that set individualism against community. He approaches the genre from a structuralist point of view, exploring the Western plots in terms of opposing axes.

unwillingness to let go of a dead body to secure his reward money brings to mind Bennie's hellish journey with Garcia's severed head in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*. Both Kemp and Bennie are intent on revenge but whereas the latter lapses into a meaningless quest with devastating personal losses, the former is ultimately rescued by forfeiting his delusional obsession and by holding on to the promise of a new beginning. In *The Far Country* James Stewart is again cast as a neurotic type, distrustful of humanity in general and unwilling to commit to any cause. As Kitses mentions:

> In general, all of Mann's heroes behave as if driven by vengeance they must inflict from having once been human, trusting and, therefore, vulnerable. Hence the schizophrenic style of the hero, the violent explosions of passion alternating with precarious moments of quiet reflection (2004: 142).

The Man from Laramie, *Winchester 73* and most compellingly, *Man of the West*, reflect upon the destructive and corrosive effects of retributive violence. And yet, despite casting light on masculinity as faulty just as Peckinpah does, Anthony Mann is able to save his heroes from destruction by annihilating the doppelganger, inimical figures who project the darkest and least appealing sides of his heroes. In this sense, they never match Peckinpah's tragic vision. In fact, Simons and Merrill describe Peckinpah's heroes as embodiments of tragic flaws, relying on the Aristotelian concept of *hamartia*. Simons and Merrill consider that in no other Western director's work are the heroes so deeply blemished, in such a way that "the damage - emotional or physical - is nothing less than permanent and irreversible" (1984: 20).

Bernard F. Dukore discovers existentialist traces in Peckinpah's work. Proving that Peckinpah had been conversant with existentialist theories since university years at University of Southern California, especially through the works of Sartre and Camus, Dukore argues that Peckinpah's heroes are "products, illustrations and consummations" (14) of an existentialist frame of mind which is perceived more clearly in the freedom to choose and the attendant responsibility for what they are regardless of the choices they have made. Even inaction is a choice with consequences and implications since as Dukore

states: "One defines oneself-either positively by choices and deeds, or negatively by evasions and inaction. Even an apparently external choice involves evasion" (1999: 13).

Interestingly, Peckinpah could be identified as a kind of John Ford's son but one who contantly defied the authority of his "father" insofar as his male protagonists, unlike Ford's, always fall short of achieving their own intents. As Kitses writes:

> If Peckinpah appeared John Ford's bastard son, it was because as an artist he was caught between the dream and the mango, the vision and the violence. The radical quality of his work - so evident in the distance between Ford's cavalry and his, between the activity on the horizon of Ford's heroes and Peckinpah's Wild Bunch, between the humor of Ford's stock company and that of the younger man's repertory (Warren Oates, L.Q. Jones, Strother Martin, Ben Johnson) - *arose naturally from a deep personal romanticism that he fought every step of the way*. And it is this tension that gave his cinema its distinctive allegorical quality, the present igniting the past, the promise and pain of America brought alive on the screen (204). (my italics)

Jon Turkas, in an *auteurist* approach to the Western directors, gives a different view:

> As Budd Boetticher before him, Peckinpah sets out to make westerns that constitute a radical departure from the sentimental romanticism of John Ford while laying an extremely heavy emphasis on the atmosphere of violence. As Boetticher and Hathaway, he dealt with the theme of isolation, but for Peckinpah it became disorientation and finally rejection. His principal characters, increasingly, came not to belong to the time in which they found themselves in his films and, ultimately, can do nothing about it except die (1985: 119).

Turkas seems to miss the fact that what defines Peckinpah's work is not a departure from romanticism but a collusion with it, even sometimes lapsing into unabashed sentimentality as seen for example in *The Wild Bunch* and the scene where the Bunch leave the village serenaded by the peasants who play "La Golondrina", (The Swallow), a valediction to a life of vitality and promise. Mexico appears no less sentimentalized here than in *Major Dundee*, a geographical site marked by new possibilities, sometimes representing the only escape from social entrapment.

Unlike Leone, who used excess to undermine the legitimacy of the gun-slinging ethos laying bare their money-grubbing and materialistic drives, Peckinpah broods over the inadequacy of this code, acknowledging its anachronism, and yet remains fetishistically attached to it, refusing to relinquish it as a loved object. Mitchell in his comparative analysis of both Peckinpah and Leone states that "Leone's wry mockery" contrasts with Peckinpah's "earnest address" (239). In relation to this contrast, he states:

> Though Peckinpah shares Leone's inclination to eviscerate Westerns while honoring them, he refuses to explode surrealistically the logic behind that tradition, choosing instead a sympathetic view that measures the genre's present inadequacy in terms of belatedness. A once-honorable set of ideals associated with the western no longer have a place, except as the measure of how far we have fallen (239).

This earnestness is strongly felt as a sign of the characters' intrinsic, oftentimes world-weary, urge to survive. Even amidst desolation they attempt to fight back against the predicaments in which they are mired, and yet despite this vital instinct they eventually die: physically (like Steve Judd or the Bunch) or emotionally (like Pat Garrett). In his interview with Stephen Farber, Peckinpah mentioned how his heroes always display weaknesses which place them far from the aestheticized, almost incorporeal, gunfighter image: "I tried to make them honest, yet they come off as human beings, which possibly is a frightening thing" (1969:11). Interestingly, Andre Bazin argues that when the Western became more self-reflexive, it paved the way for what he coins the "super-western"; *Shane* being one such example of "super-westernization" (152) since Stevens "set out to justify the western by the western" (152), concentrating on and sharpening the myths that the genre had always cultivated. Tellingly, John Cawelti observes that, as the genre became self-aware of its formulaic premises, it also prepared the ground for its own exhaustion and demise. Cawelti considers Peckinpah one of the last directors who could not resist celebrating the genre's complex simplicity,[39] at the same time as he sadly recognized the

[39] Philip French, apropos of the work of Sam Peckinpah, quotes Godard: "American directors, he said, "have a gift for the kind of simplicity which brings depth - in a little Western like *Ride the High Country*, for instance, if one tries to do that in France, one looks like an intellectual" (94) .

waning of its significance for audiences who no longer felt drawn to men on horseback. In this context, it is worth quoting Cawelti at length:

> At first this awareness may produce the richest and best instances of the genre, but eventually the genre becomes more and more reflexive and begins to feed on itself through parodic or ironic versions of the type. When this happens a decline is almost certain to set in sooner or later, for the genre is no longer taken seriously by its creators. Something like this has, I believe, happened to the Western. Beginning with the Leatherstocking Tales of James Fenimore Cooper, it became a formula in the multitudinous dime novels and early films of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Revitalized by the adult Western fiction of writers like Owen Wister, Emerson Hough and Harold Bell Wright, the Western film became a fully conscious genre in the late 1930s. The great Westerns created between 1940 and 1970 by directors like John Ford, Howard Hawks, Fred Zinnemann, Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher and Sam Peckinpah represent that classic phase of balance between awareness of the Western as a genre and commitment to the genre as a meaningful representation of life. The last director in this mold is Sam Peckinpah, whose central theme, the passing of the heroic time of the Old West, is also a way of expressing something about the exhaustion of the genre (1984: 14).

In a similar vein Jane Tompkins argues:

> Just as human beings age they become more and more like themselves, so as the Western ages, death comes more and more to the fore, and there emerges an even greater consciousness, at least on the part of Western film makers, of the genre's characteristic moves. In *The Wild Bunch*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance* Kid (1969), and in a different way, *The Shootist* (1976) death becomes the central focus: the death of the Old West, the death of the main characters, and the impending death of the genre itself. You might say that in these films death is almost the only thing (1992: 25-26).

As this self-consciousness becomes a more prominent trait, melancholy and rumination also become more salient features. Jane Tompkins argues that the genre had always flirted with the idea of death to such an extent that death and the moments that precede it are object of detailed stylization:

> To go west, as far west as you can go, west of everything, is to die. Death is everywhere in the genre. Not just in the shoot-outs or in the stories of bodies that pile up towards the narrative close, but even more compellingly, in the desert landscape with which the bodies of the gunned down eventually merge. The classical western landscape is a tableau of towering rock and stretching sand where nothing lives. Its aura of death, both parodied and insisted on in places like Deadwood and

> Tombstone, is one of the genre's most essential features, more seductive than the saloon girl's breasts, more necessary than six-guns (24).

She adds:

> The ritualization of the moment of death that climaxes most Western films and novels hovers over the whole story and gives typical scenes a faintly sacramental aura. The narrative's stylization is a way of controlling its violence. It is because the Western depicts life lived at the edge of death that the plot, the characters, the setting, the language, the gestures, and even the incidental episodes - a bath, a shave, a game of cards - are so predictable (25).

Significantly, Philip French also observes that one of the most striking features of this genre is the way it faces death head on. Through narratives of ageing and physical decay, the genre had always foregrounded death as central and inevitable to human existence and as it grew old, alongside its stars, death became more representative of the ebbing away of the frontier mythology and its inevitable relocation into other contexts. No wonder the tropes of the Western morph into the urban cop thrillers of the seventies and the processes of dying become more graphically represented. French observes:

> Death is confronted directly as a fact of existence, possibly the ultimate fact, not to be taken lightly or to be viewed without perspective. It is the great leveller unifying hunter and prey, part of a pattern which completes a life but at the same time implies a sense of the continuity of generations within family and society. To me the attitude towards ageing and death is one of the most impressive characteristics of the western and sets apart the best examples of the genre, and many mediocre ones as well from gangster films or spy movies (…). Good or bad a Westerner is entitled to a Christian burial and his passing is marked. That life may be easily taken does not mean that it is cheap or of no significance (2005: 74).

Scenes of dying and burials pervade a genre which veers towards what Mitchell defines as "a necrological impulse" (172). That Peckinpah casts himself as an undertaker, building a child's coffin, in one of his most melancholy and angst-ridden films, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, appears pregnant with meaning in the context. When compared to Leone's automaton-like characters and the emptied-out social world in which they move, Peckinpah's protagonists are taken too seriously to be subverted by parody. There is in

Peckinpah a longing for authenticity, a craving for a code which is constantly flouted by his characters' mistakes. Mitchell also highlights how Peckinpah distances himself from Leone's debunking vision of the genre, even if sharing some of the latter's debased perception of male heroics. He states:

> Leone had been willing to accept the terms of this debased vision, renegotiating generic conventions in order to explore where the western might go from there. By contrast, Peckinpah rails against such a diminished conception, unwilling to accept the loss of moral idealism that had always been central to the genre, yet from a modern perspective unable realistically to imagine what a fixed code might mean, if in part because resistant to the idea of allowing conventions to be fixed at all. His renegotiation of the Western, therefore, corresponds to his view of everyday life: unstructured, undirected, impulsive (245).

It is interesting how Mitchell posits Peckinpah's nostalgic longing for idealism as an expression of "an unstructured", unanchored existence, trying to find solace in a romanticized past. Robin Wood observed about Peckinpah's work still during his life time:

> Peckinpah's work to date witnesses the predicament of the artist who is vociferously anti-Establishment yet lacks any defined ideological alternative: it has the strengths and limitations which such a description suggests. It is doubtful, however, whether he could, or would wish to, be an American Godard: the sort of "freedom" his work explicitly and implicitly extols is essentially primitive, even brutish, probable intractable in relation to the disciplines of a conscious social-political programme (1980:772).

Recurrently, signs of progress are rendered threatening, ominous, reflective of the characters' displacement from the social order. In *Junior Bonner*, the eponymous hero is sickened by the sight of bulldozers levelling his father's place, trampling over and effacing the memories of the past. Cable Hogue is run over by a brakeless automobile symbolizing the tyranny of technology and progress in contrast with Cable's serendipity. This perspective also pervades *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (George Roy Hill, 1969) where the bicycle stands for changing times - but the film is transitional in its lighter, comedy-inflected mood, projecting, as in *Support your Local Sheriff* - released in the same year - a much less anxious tone.

As Freud stated, the sense of mourning does not have necessarily to stem from the loss of a loved person but can take the form of:

> (…) an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on. In some people, whom we have for this reason suspected of having a pathological disposition, melancholia appears in place of mourning" (2005: 203).

Peckinpah's unstable and shifting moods are well described by the work of biographers like David Weddle, Garner Simmons and Marshall Fine. Displaying a proclivity for temper tantrums, Peckinpah fits Freud's description of a pathological personality who remained incapable of processing the work of mourning, internalizing instead an unresolved grief. His problematic relationship with his mother, a love-hate liaison which threatened to smother Peckinpah as a young child, remained the most deep-seated source for his unstable behaviour. A domineering and manipulative personality, Fern Peckinpah exerted her power over all the males in the family, displaying a special fondness for Peckinpah in his childhood years, often referring to him as her "precious D. Sammy" (Weddle 1994: 115). And yet, despite this deep connection with his mother and his internal split between the feminized world she stood for and the staunchly masculine world represented by his father and grandfather, Peckinpah desperately attempted to live up to what it meant to be a man, a pressure to correspond to an image of manhood that capitalized on suppressing one's more "feminized" - construed as weaker - side. According to Weddle, "Peckinpah inherited his mother's talent for manipulating others. As an adult he developed a genius for it, but in his adolescent years he grew to detest his mother's grim dictatorship" (1994: 27). Significantly, Terence Butler states about Peckinpah's protagonists:

> So much of the behavior of Peckinpah's heroes - the fits of melancholy, the fear about trusting, the sheltering behind authoritarian principles - can be put down to an exclusion from love, we can never imagine any of his heroes having a childhood; rather they all seem to have been ripped from the womb and thrust into a world of struggle (27).

He also adds:

> In depicting a world that is strongly patriarchal, Peckinpah not so much details the frustrations of the maternal principle as mourns this frustration. Mothers are never able to fulfil their roles properly: in *Alfredo Garcia* a mother can only look on mutely as her daughter is tortured, while in *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid* Mrs Horrel is prevented from giving Billy a meal by the eruption of violence. Even more extensively than Walsh, Peckinpah seeks to present his heroes as sons excluded from maternal warmth (28).

In fine, these portrayals of Peckinpah's world evokes loss as the underlying condition to generating melancholy - pivotal in Freud's elaboration on melancholia - but also the object-related theorization of Melanie Klein and her central idea of the depressive position, which must be assuaged, at a later stage, by a positive introjection of the mother, as the first object of love. Klein postulated that the first traumatic loss is experienced in childhood through weaning,[40] setting forth a depressive position which may be relived in adult life depending on whether it has been surpassed in earlier stages or not. By depressive position, she "refers to the infant's inner turmoil and distress accompanying weaning; the first painful, frustrating and alarming experience of separation and loss, and the recognition that a whole object is both loved and hated" (Radden 2000: 298). Moreover, as Radden explains, based upon Klein's theories:

> Adult mourning also returns its sufferer to the depressive position, for adult mourning is itself a kind of neurosis. Not only do adult neuroses lead back to the depressive position: a failure to satisfactorily resolve the depressive position accounts for all adult adjustment problems. Such a satisfactory resolution, for Klein, requires introjecting the sense of love, goodness, and security provided by the good object (2000: 298).

Esther Sánchez Pardo considers Klein "the theorist of melancholia" (147) *par excellence*. Despite relying on Freud and on his elaboration on the death drive, acknowledging at the same time that melancholia stems from an aborted process of mourning, Klein postulates that melancholia entails a regression to a traumatic loss, that of the maternal, carving a

[40] In section four, part three, Melanie Klein's work is referenced as an important landmark in the studies of melancholia.

space for loneliness which can never be overcome lest the subject be able to introject that first object of love as a good object, deflecting and disavowing any aggressive or destructive instincts projected onto the external - the mother's body. This aggressiveness is part of the subject's defense mechanisms whereby he/she negotiates his/her frustration and lack of satisfaction in relation to his/her perception of loss. The need to overcome these feelings of aggression, stemming from the sadistic desire to incorporate the mother's body as a whole, is the necessary condition for ushering the subject out of a psychotic-schizoid position which would entrap him/her in feelings of guilt and distress. Klein posits love and trust as pivotal in reinforcing the ego's formation and its capacity to transform loose, fragmented *imagos* or "phantasy figures" (Sánchez: 132), whereby good and bad residual images are still muddled and blurred in the subject's psychic life, into good internal objects which may help tackle the depressive position attendant upon the first experience of loss - and its ancillary melancholia. Thus, Sánchez observes:

> The increase of love and trust and the diminishing of fears through happy experiences help the child overcome depression and feeling of loss (mourning). They enable the child to test his/her inner reality by means of outer reality. Along with this goes the child's attempt to firmly establish his or her "good" objects as a means of overcoming the depressive position (129).

This requires a constant process of restoration and a "reparative tendency" (144) which aims at deflecting the feelings of sorrow, guilt and anxiety that are fostered by the painful loss of the object of love. Only through a life-affirming urge can the subject engage in the reparative process necessary to restore the wounds and fissures that the depressive position activates and reactivates throughout a person's existence. As Sánchez argues, Klein's description of melancholia and the constant process of reparation that the subject's mind endeavors to achieve provides for a more dynamic rendition of the psychic mechanisms involved in the complex processes of mourning and melancholia. She states:

> Klein thus suggests that the psychic system is always under construction. The flexibility of her notion of "positions" that fluctuate and interact resolves in a much better way the problem of providing a model for the psychic apparatus. The Kleinian psychic system is always in flux and unsettled, always in a precarious, contingent and transitory, unfinished state (131).

That Klein posited sublimation along with restoration as a process which might render melancholia constructive and creative seems to accord with contemporary critical views which have attempted to read melancholia in more positive terms. Sánchez claims that artistic creation can be entwined with this ongoing reparation-driven, psychic process whereby the ego "faces its good objects in a state of disintegration - in a state of dissolution in bits" and attempts to "avoid disintegration by restoring the perfection of the primal form" (123). Bearing in mind the constant aggression to which Peckinpah's heroes are subject, which entails invariably violent bodily disintegration, I argue that Peckinpah's *oeuvre* reflects an incapacity to escape from the cycle of aggressiveness, hatred and guilt which prevents the subject from moving from a paranoid-schizoid position into the depressive position which might pave the way for the introjection of the goodness in the lost loved object. Though the depressive position always presupposes the loss of an object of love, it also allows a life-affirming flight from the death drive instincts and a constant negotiation between the recognition of frustration - since "melancholia, as an incorporative mechanism, has its origin in frustration" (Sánchez: 165) - and an ongoing, fluctuating restorative process that strengthens the ego formation of the subject and his/her psychic balance.

Peckinpah's difficult relations with his mother, her overwhelming influence on him even in his adult life, seem to have fostered in him an ambivalent position towards women, strengthening his tendency to misogyny. Peckinpah's first devastating experience of betrayal was felt early in his life when his mother, unbeknownst to every member in the family, decided to sell his grandfather's ranch. This constituted a severe blow since this ranch harbored most of his most positive childhood memories. In this sense, David Weddle states that this had such a negative effect on Peckinpah's psyche that "from this point onward betrayal would became a dominant theme in Peckinpah's work" (1996: 190). It is credible that the idea of loss affected Peckinpah from a very early stage in life: his grandfather's ranch became a lost loved object which he was never capable of overcoming, displacing onto it a myriad of romanticized connections which fed his idealized vision of the West.

With these reflections in mind, Peckinpah's melancholia posits a nostalgic longing for an unnamable "what"- to use Freud's words - a restlessness that haunts his male heroes and pushes them into thwarted quests and anguished yearnings. However, while to some extent Peckinpah's initial work empowers male subjectivity even at its angst-ridden nadir, as in *Ride the High Country* or *The Wild Bunch* (although they are criminals, the Bunch's ultimate self-sacrifice results from Pike's melancholy musings), it can be argued that this sense of melancholia will be progressively emptied out of any sense of empowerment coming from a romanticization of masculine alienation. This supposition would chime in with Stephen Prince's views that the melancholic stance, always present in Peckinpah's work, becomes more acutely felt in what he calls the "melancholia trilogy": *Straw Dogs*, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. While acknowledging that these films are different in tone, the icy melancholia of *Straw Dogs* contrasting with the "lush elegiacs" (140) of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* or the "ugliness and hopelessness" (145) of *Bring Me The Head of Alfredo Garcia*, Prince's exploration of these films drive to the conclusion that the validation of an empowered male subjectivity is precluded by the ravaging effects that violence exerts on Peckinpah's male characters. Hence, these films distinguish themselves from *The Wild Bunch* in that the Bunch, by making the choice of sacrificing their lives to save Angel, "were able to reaffirm their residual humanity, thereby giving the ensuing violence a heroic dimension" (141). This does not happen in Peckinpah's subsequent work. Accordingly, I will argue that the sense of masculine empowerment, which Schiesari critically posits as deriving from a gendered construction of melancholia, is rendered questionable not only by Peckinpah's depiction of a tarnished masculinity, but also by anxiety over age, sexual diminishment and the evacuation of emotional ties held together by friendship and male bonding.

In the following sections, four films will be explored in more detail insofar as they are the most developed expression of Peckinpah's melancholy disappointment. Although Prince highlights the melancholia in *Straw Dogs,* I will explore his film in my last part since it offers ripe terrain for dealing with misogyny. I will attempt to show the idea that, in Peckinpah's male-oriented world, melancholia acquires different contours and although it is particularly

resonant in his Western films, it can also be strongly felt in his incursions into other genres, such as the war film *Cross of Iron* and the gothic revenge tale *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*. From probing different ideas and themes and attempting to connect them with Peckinpah's allegiance to an impossible code of honor, I hope to show that melancholia and masculinity in his films are not empowering in the Aristotelian tradition but often convey a sense of disempowerment and alienation. Although Peckinpah's films center around masculine images, I will show they are essentially suicidal in form. Whilst *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and *Junior Bonner* are suffused with nostalgic longing, *Cross of Iron* and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* express the most nihilistic and defeatist phase in Peckinpah's career, culminating in *The Osterman Weekend* where his indictment of power structures appears bound up with a distrust of modernity and technological progress. Misanthropy becomes here the striking evidence of his obsessive regression to an idealized past.

i- Melancholia and age anxiety in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*

"This country is getting old and I aim to get old with it."
Pat Garrett (James Coburn) in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973)

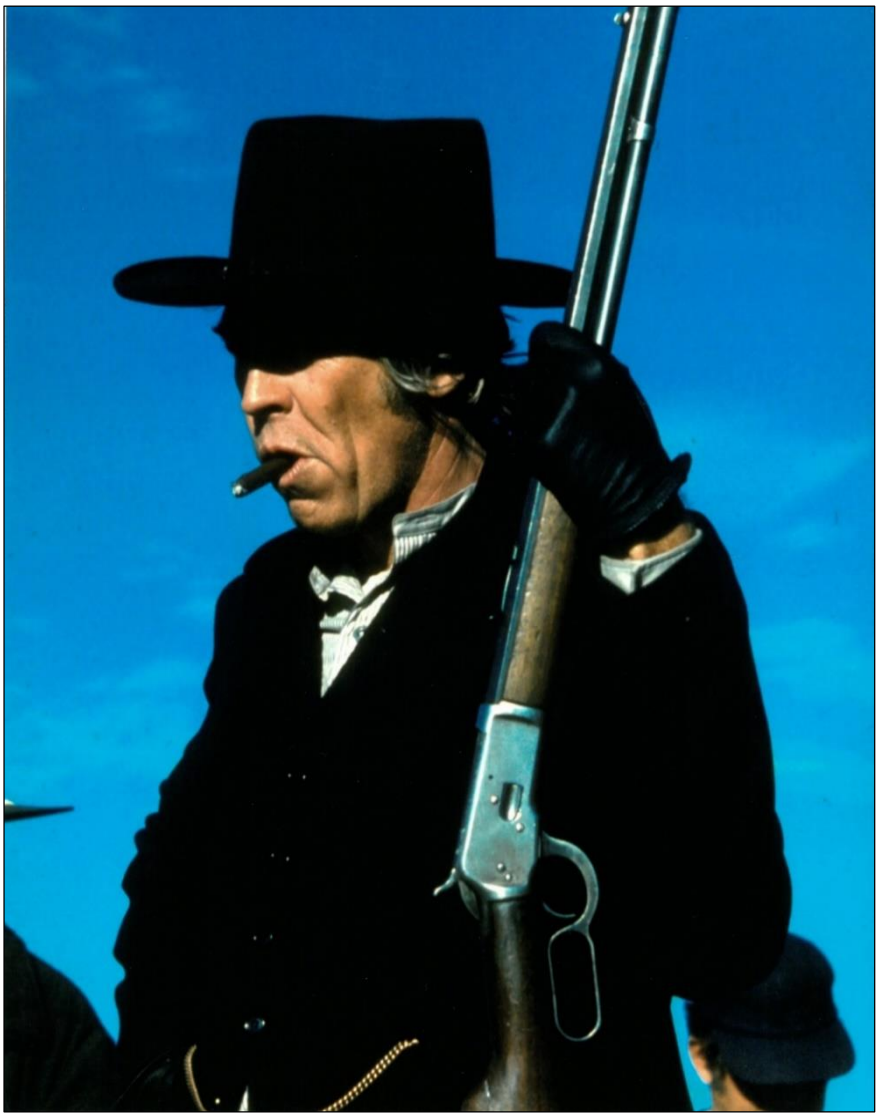
Few films have been as enmeshed in unresolved matters and contentious production issues as *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. Its shooting and post-production were exhausting processes. Both director Peckinpah and MGM producer, James Aubrey, never came to any sort of agreement as to what the final artistic outcome should be. Much has been said about Aubrey's commercial ambitions for the film which created animosity during and after its making. Paul Seydor has extensively documented the way one of the most energy-sapping projects of Peckinpah's career was maimed by the studio, with its initial preview whittled down to a truncated 106-minute-long theatrical release, seriously damaging narrative coherence and compromising character motivation.[41] Whilst these aspects are of extreme importance when we consider Peckinpah's progressive disenchantment with the structures of industry power, this is not my concern here. I wish to analyze the vision of masculinity impaired by age that the film contains and its underlying melancholy tone. I will use Seydor to fill in for the excisions the released film has.

As in *The Wild Bunch*, with Pike and Thornton, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* traces the deterioration of a friendship, increasingly untenable as it comes under pressure from material and economic power structures. Accordingly, the film is about two men, former outlaws and friends, whose bond is sundered when one of them changes sides and starts working as a lawman since, as he maintains more than once, he wants "to be rich, old and gray". The first images of the film shot in sepia are set in 1901 when Pat, by then a grumpy old man, rich and powerful as he had wished to be, is seen bickering over stray cattle on his lands, abusing the law which he had upheld in the past as his means of "staying alive". Ironically, he is shot by Poe who had helped him to kill the Kid in the past and who has become his new partner in business. Peckinpah juxtaposes these sepia-saturated images

[41] For details on this issue Paul Seydor's *Peckinpah: The Western Films: a Reconsideration* (1997) gives an excellent account of the whole convoluted process of direction and production in this film.

with others set in 1881 in Old Fort Sumner, where we are introduced to the Kid and his Bunch amusing themselves with target practice shooting at chickens buried in the sand up to their necks. Pat arrives at this derelict, dust-swept place and joins in the display of marksmanship by aiming at the hapless buried birds. “Not bad for an old married man”, the Kid observes, taunting Garrett and setting the tone for the main motif of the film, that of ageing. Pat has come to tell Billy “the electorate wants him gone”, that he has become redundant in the new political economy which, as Billy remarks “is putting a fence around this country”. The juxtaposition of the images, the interlocking of a different time and place, purport to comment on Pat’s own entrapment and the way his past actions catch up with him in the form of a violent retributive death. Pat’s betrayal of his integrity and his subsequent jettisoning of values which might have anchored his existence to enduring emotional ties are thus rendered pointless.

18. Pat Garrett visiting his friend Billy the Kid in Fort Sumner, telling him his days are over.



19. Pat Garrett (James Coburn) still confident of his mission in a scene where he ambushes the Kid and a bunch of rustlers. His self-assured bearing here contrasts with his broken-down, exhausted demeanor at the end of the film.

Whilst the idea of the obsolescence of the outlaw has already been explored in many other Westerns, like *The Gunfighter* or *Shane,* Peckinpah gives this theme a different inflection by concentrating not so much on the aesthetic or mythical dimension of the doomed gunslinger as on conflictual polarities such as friendship and betrayal, youth and age, individualism and corporate power. Throughout the film Billy's youth is contrasted with Pat's age, the former's freedom clashing with the latter's allegiance to corrupt power. This is further borne out by the way Pat is regarded with suspicion and animosity by those who surround him. In one of the most resonant scenes in the film, restored in a subsequent

version after the initial release, Pat is accused by his estranged Mexican wife of not touching her, of being "dead inside", which openly references male sexual dysfunction. Significantly, this evokes a later scene where Pat insists on paying for the services of Ruthie Lee, a prostitute who works at Rupert's place and who had some time before been with the Kid. Pat's recognition of his own physical decay may be allayed by the delusion that the Kid's sexual prodigality may rub off on him and thus assuage his andropausal anxiety. Moreover, as he slaps her around and demands she tell him the Kid's whereabouts, he comes to represent the image of a diminished masculinity, one which attempts to compensate for a perceived loss of sexual potency by exerting authority over women through violence. This mirrors Poe's own sexual repression which is suggested by his discomfiture when he finds Pat lying in bed with an entourage of prostitutes or by the scene where he gratuitously hits the woman who is sleeping with Luke (Harry Dean Stanton), one of the Kid's gang.[42] Brad Stevens reinforces this idea:

> That Garrett's impotence is rooted in a feeling of extreme disgust for female sexuality (a characteristic emphasized in his mirror image Poe, notably in Poe's look of revulsion as he slaps the women sleeping with Luke) is established early on in Billy's recollection of a "humorous" exchange between Garrett and a prostitute which apparently ended with Garrett informing the woman that her vagina "could use a few stitches" (note also the way Garrett protectively covers his genitals as he is being bathed by the prostitutes at the brothel). We are obviously meant to compare Garrett's relationship with women particularly Ida, to Billy's relationship with Maria, which is based on tenderness, affection and a mutually shared sexuality enjoyed, for its own sake, as an expression of love (1996: 275-276).

Pat is often shot in isolation (like Dundee), his lean figure in stern, black attire enhancing his estrangement from all the familiar faces and places from his past. He seems to evoke a certain puritanism with his taciturnity. Having forsaken who he was and what he stood for, he also ensures his own eviction from the social milieu which he had recognized as his own. As Billy points out "the law is a funny thing" and its ever shifting applications only

[42] A similar scene of violence against prostitutes is seen in *Bring Me The Head of Alfredo Garcia*, where one of the henchmen who tries to get Alfredo Garcia's head hits with extreme violence one of the prostitutes who works in a bar where the men try to get some information.

emphasize how male bonding is threatened by external circumstances and how important it is in compensating for this inconsistency.

20. Pat Garrett with Governor Wallace (Jason Robards) selling his services to the Santa-Fe Ring.

Moreover, as Pat pursues Billy, his countenance becomes more brooding and the quest is deferred, his actions erratic. When he assures his wife that he will capture Billy because "there's too much play in him", she lashes out at him "and not enough in you", suggesting that the Kid's playfulness signals a life-affirming, untrammeled demeanor whereas Pat's gravity hints at his sterile, emotionally crippled state. Brad Stevens emphasizes the importance of the character of Alias in the construction of Billy's masculinity, underlining how Bob Dylan and his association with the free-wheeling 60s and 70s liberation movements reinforce Billy's vitality and freedom, contrasting with Pat's capitulation. He writes:

> Bob Dylan's role as Alias seems to have confounded most commentators, but he has a clear role within the film structure. Alias and Poe both function as a reflection of the two central characters, a function made explicit through a pattern of comparisons and juxtapositions (273).

In an interesting reading of Alias's function, Leonard Engel explores questions of identity - and the intersection of these identities - that the film raises. When asked by Pat "Who are you?" Alias replies: "That's a good question", pointing to the indeterminate, unresolved nature of his own role and the way it is gradually forged by his relationship with Billy, substituting the bond the latter had had with Pat. Engel states:

> In *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, Peckinpah also emphasizes identity particularly that of Alias, a term that ironically focuses the theme of announcing a no-name character. This namelessness and what it suggests about Alias's identity, however, also cause a reexamination of the two main characters Billy and Pat, who have well-known names and seem to have fixed identities - at least in the beginning. Additionally this theme also embraces larger issues, such as the changing times and changes in the nature of the Western itself (2003: 200).

He also notices:

> If one has difficulty determining Billy's nature and identity, one has even more trouble with the character of Alias, whom Barry Sarchett calls a "purposeful muddle". Peckinpah adds a clever touch to the complexity with the changing hats. In each of Alias's appearances, he is wearing a different hat (Sarchett 1992, 178), as though each were a different identity he is trying on for size (201).

21. Bob Dylan as Alias wearing one of his flamboyant hats, mirroring the Kid's insouciance.

Moreover, Engle also explores the idea that Alias is the embodiment of the myth-maker as perceived by his silent, observing stance and the way he is often positioned as a spectator to the actions unfolded. This myth-making quality is constantly approached and even ironized insofar as Dylan's songs eulogize a mythical figure whose flaws the film exposes. Dylan's soundtrack for the film drives its nostalgic tone and it has become an important element in the film's reappraisal and rehabilitation. This also entwines with Kitses's comments when he remarks how the characters seem to inhabit a hyper-reality where "signifier and signified have separated, image and action, aesthetic and ideology are disjunct. And it is this haunting quality, incipient schizophrenia, that gives the film its angst" (2004: 232). He writes:

> As opposed to the upright stature and moral drive of Joel McCrea's Steve Judd in *High Country*, Peckinpah gives us a languid stardom in *Pat Garrett*, characters who exhibit a kind of glamour. They look, they pose, they make speeches, they are legend. Inhabiting a cozy old-world global village, these privileged members of a frontier pantheon are introduced by Peckinpah in freeze-frame cameos over the film's credits that immortalize this bunch, all insider looks, jokes, one-liners and tall tales ("So Pat said…"). Were ever images and character so deliberate in the genre, actions so mannered? Towards the end of the film, when Billy has returned to Fort Sumner after aborting his escape to Mexico, he greets Beaver with a languid left hand, a Hollywood hand shake on the frontier. Self-consciousness is everywhere (232).

The playfulness in Alias's attire mirrors Billy's state of eternal immaturity as can be also perceived in his connection with children. Stevens emphasizes this fact by stating that the Kid's "ease and naturalness with children" (274) contrasts with Pat's surly demeanor and his growing taciturnity. The emphasis on the childish in Peckinpah's *ouevre*, not only confirmed by the many children that appear in his films but also by the construction of immature male characters (Ace Bonner is after all another Kid, refusing to grow up) may suggest how Peckinpah is fixated in the past and returns to it with a kind of "repetition compulsion" to evoke Ruti's words in part three, page 153. Moreover, Engel emphasizes how Pat undergoes an identity crisis which is the reason for his dilatory behavior in relation to the Kid's capture. Engel observes in this regard:

> At the beginning the character appears to know who and what he is, and what he wants. He is controlling and manipulative, forcing others, Billy and Alias most notably, to realize who they are. However, he seems not very satisfied with the new identity he has carved out for himself. Focusing in Coburn's world-weary face, Peckinpah vividly conveys the dramatic tension arising from Garrett's identity crisis. Thus, while the sheriff's actions are those of someone with a firm identity and in control, his face tells another story; it reveals his unhappiness and self-disgust (203).

The much-discussed raft scene,[43] which seems to serve no narrative purpose whatsoever, seems to invest Pat with a playfulness which his job as a lawman had denied him. Yet, the way he acts - cunningly hiding behind a tree - points to his competitive nature and to his

[43] This particular scene became a tug of war between Aubrey and Peckinpah. The former insisted on its lack of narrative consistency and value and the latter fought for its inclusion, underpinning its importance in terms of the character's psychological density. In the end, the scene was not removed.

stealthy, deceptive manner. While camping by the river, Garrett watches a family on a houseboat, the family patriarch trying to target shoot a bottle floating at the surface. Pat aims and fires at the same bottle, unable to resist the temptation to turn the moment into a marksmanship contest, recalling the fun scenario in the opening sequence. Stephen Prince argues that the scene "fades out on this image of reflexive, irrational violence of Garrett's thwarted attempt at sociality and of endemic psychological malevolence and mistrust"(Prince: 182) and yet, the scene seems more of a comment on male gaucherie and bravado rather than an indictment of a violent masculine compulsion.

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That the Kid is no Shane, no pristine figure, is significant in the revisionist stance that the film traces. In fact, Billy does not always play fair, cheating in duels, deceitfully shooting his enemies in the back as he does with deputy Bell who even naively asks him "You wouldn't shoot me in the back, would you?". While Peckinpah does not show the same cynical detachment which Leone reveals in his dollar trilogy, the Kid's image is tarnished by a predatory survival instinct. Apropos of the ambivalence of character, Paul Seydor argues that "there is about him an aura of ambiguous, unresolved adolescence that is constantly pulling him back toward childhood even as the forces around him are insisting upon his obligations and responsibilities" (1997: 290). Hence, Seydor considers that Pat has awakened to maturity where he recognizes that times have indeed changed and, therefore, that one must adapt to this. By contrast, Billy remains in a narcissistic regression to the past, unable to imagine other options besides those articulated in the counterculture "rolling stone"-discourse of leaving at anytime, or living anywhere, or anyhow, as underlined by his conversation with the myth-maker cum story-teller Alias - "Alias anything you please". What Seydor suggests is that Billy's desultory engagement in fruitless actions, his elusive, always already erotic smile steer him away from reality, ensuring that "his reasons for not acting can be guessed at and he remains a remote, mysterious figure, his very elusiveness the basis for his fecundity as a symbolic figure in story-telling and myth making" (1997: 290). Stevens challenges Seydor's view by claiming that Pat's alleged maturity results from his implication in the corruptive forces which curtail freedom and individuality. He writes:

> Garrett has certainly passed beyond Billy's values, the "immature" values of friendship, love, self-respect and generosity; he is characterized by his "mature" betrayal of all his past friends, his "mature" relationship with his wife, whom he detests, and his "mature" association with his business partners, whom he hates as much as he loves Billy, the man he kills at their behest (270).

It is interesting that all killings in the film are executions, and characters like deputy Bell (Matt Clark), Alamosa Bill (Jack Elam) are unfairly executed by the Kid whereas members of the latter's gang are in turn killed by Pat who, as we can see in Lemuel (Chris Wills)'s saloon, bullies his former associates into suicidal action. By culminating in the Kid's own death, and much later in Pat's, these executions seem to articulate a Vietnam-inflected feeling of random annihilation, dramatizing how Peckinpah perceived American counterinsurgency politics as essentially corrupt.

As the film narrative progresses and reaches its denouement, Peckinpah seems to become more obsessed with Pat's internal division, bringing into focus the character's painful perception of his age and his self-serving goals as a projection of impotence and failure. Moreover, the character's sense of guilt in relation to what he perceives as an act of betrayal, his awareness that "what you want and what you get" are two different things, make him a psychologically dense character akin to Pike and Steve Judd, men who realized they had to start "thinking beyond their guns" and tackle head-on their age-inflicted shortcomings. Suffice it to say, the director himself makes a cameo appearance as Will, the coffin maker, who chastises Pat as he enters the Fort to kill the Kid: "You finally figured it out. Come on, get it over with". And Pat gets it over with it: when he eventually shoots the Kid, the moment is aesthetically stylized in slow motion *à la* Peckinpah. The absence of human volition is endowed with a balletic beauty where the Kid's body falling backwards and the head hitting the ground is interspersed with Pat shooting at his distorted image in the mirror, venting his self-loathing. Suggestively, as Seydor writes (1997), the Kid's body shows no signs of having been shot, remaining unblemished, as if already inscribed in legend. The moment is fraught with melancholy as Pat sits down on the swing, drained and exhausted, the protracted act finally accomplished but his guilt-drenched demeanor

bespeaking his pain. Mike's words in the *The Killer Elite* are appropriate here: "If a guy can blow up his best friend, where's the morality in the world?"

Michael Sragow asserted that "Peckinpah was a master of the long goodbye" (Bliss 1994: 181) and this film is rife with long goodbyes: Sheriff Baker (Slim Pickens)'s death scene by the river leaving behind the half-built boat needed to get out of "this damn territory", his delusional dream ebbing away together with his last remnants of conscience, or Pat's image riding away at the end, an angry child running after him, throwing pellets of dirt, in stark contrast with the ending of Shane where the young boy pleads with the hero to come back. The film is thus a striking example of melancholia, pointing to the painful perception that there are decisions in life which will forever determine our sense of identity by disrupting beliefs which have hitherto guided our existence. Pat rides away, forsaking his old self, his frayed link with a past where he had felt safe through male bonding. Much later, as his shattered mirror image had ominously presaged, he realizes the futility of his actions. By killing his long-life friend in an act of self-preservation he is destroying a part of himself. He therefore dies out of myth and into history, as a footnote to his friend's life.

22. Pat Garrett looking at the Kid's dead body, lying on the floor in Christ-like posture. His mission grimly accomplished.

ii- Melancholia and nostalgia in *Junior Bonner*

"I gotta go down my own road!"
Junior Bonner (Steve McQueen) in *Junior Bonner* (1972)

The idea that times have changed, to recall Pat's dictum, is prominent in *Junior Bonner* and, although the film is a reflection on masculinity - and the kind of masculinity that Peckinpah clearly extolled-, I will concentrate on the underlying strand of nostalgia that it conveys. This nostalgic longing is rendered through the portrait of a family in which members have grown apart but nonetheless still nourish strong feelings for each other. Although Peckinpah had five children, it is interesting how family relations seldom feature in his films, his characters usually being bereft of any family or home context. Angel in *The Wild Bunch* is, unlike the other members of the Bunch, emotionally rooted in his native village and thus he projects an idealism which the others have long forsaken. *Junior Bonner* also sets out to explore how individualism, "the need to get down one's own road", in the Western manner, entails fear of putting down roots and settling into the predictability - read tediousness in the Western codes - of family life. It is interesting that after *Straw Dogs*, a film excoriated for its violence, Peckinpah directs his gentlest film where the only violent scene is a barroom brawl with comic overtones, as if evoking the memory of the Western's saloon set-to. Robin Wood argues:

> Finally, *Junior Bonner* - both in themes and quality - fully justifies my claim that Peckinpah is the true heir of Ford. Stylistically, the film, with its tense and nervous surface (one has the impression of more cutting than in any other Peckinpah movie) is very far from Ford. But its complex treatment of the tension between wandering and settling, and exceptionally for Peckinpah - of the family, places it firmly in the tradition of Ford's Westerns. The film allows us to respond to its characters and situations in an unusually complex way. There is no question here of the reassertion of Fordian values: American civilization, and the family with it, is shown to be in an advanced state of disintegration. Yet the emotional pulls of family relationships are allowed their affirmative strength, the bleakness of the overall vision - the sense that no one has anywhere to go - being qualified throughout by a powerfully communicated generosity and human warmth (1980: 774).

Peckinpah contrasts a romanticized vision of the past with a technological, materialistic present and infuses his film with a craving for male independence. Through the roaming figure of Junior Bonner, a rodeo star who has seen better days, Peckinpah muses over the emptiness of modern times, marked negatively by economic speculation, as endorsed by Junior's brother Curly (Joe Don Baker). Notwithstanding the idea that Bonner's way of life is deemed more genuine and authentic, retaining some of the values of the lost frontier, there is also the melancholy recognition that he has failed to benefit from the economic opportunities which his brother, in his businesslike approach to the West, - cashing in on its mythology as a commodity - has seized for himself and for his family. The idea that Bonner is no longer in his prime is stated directly by Buck - Ben Johnson as a rodeo entrepreneur - who remarks: "Now you might as well face it; you're just not the rider you were a few years ago". We see him wrapping bandages around his bruised midriff, sometimes limping, evincing the physical damage inflicted by rodeo competitions.[44] As Richard Hutson observes:

> When the two brothers first meet, they exchange greetings by patting each other in their midriffs. Curly has put on a protective layer of fat, Junior has exposed and bruised ribs and winces at the gesture. The two bodies figure their respective commitments to the west and its heritage (2003: 164).

While Curly's body reflects his prosperity, Junior's is marked by pain and the constant need for physical rehabilitation: his commitment to the West's heritage feeds on its image of masculinity, which needs reinforcement through testing. The film's simplicity is illusory: Peckinpah renders Junior's painful memories of defeat, in his failed attempt to ride the bucking bull Sunshine, in the film's initial credit sequence.Through split screen (a technique he had also used in *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*), images of Junior's eight-second attempt to ride the bull are interspersed with his driving away to another rodeo, this time in Prescott, his hometown. Sunshine is fetishistically shot in many scenes, intruding upon the narrative in black and white, fleeting photography. This emphasises how Bonner bitterly harbours

[44] Nicholas Ray's *The Lusty Men* (1952) is an interesting predecessor of *Junior Bonner* centering on rodeo life and issues of domesticity as opposed to a roaming existence.

his past failures and his obsessive intent to prove his masculinity by successfully riding the bull.

Still in the credit sequence, one sees images of Junior's driving alone, his sleeping outdoors signaling his nomadic existence. Peckinpah's usual defiant signature "directed by Sam Peckinpah" does not emerge from a violent set-piece but is imposed over the image of Junior in his sleeping bag, waking up to a sunny morning. As we soon perceive, this situation is less a projection of the character's attachment to nature than a sign of impoverishment. He is bankrupt, "busted" as he acknowledges, unable to "grubstake" his father's delusional dream of going to Australia or even to pay back the loan his mother Ellie (Ida Lupino) had given him in the past, as surfaces in a conversation between the two. As he mentions to Buck, "money is nobody's favorite", asking him to set the draw so that he may ride Sunshine again, a test of his own mastery. The past and the present are contrasted through the opposition of values and principles which both Curly and Junior embrace and the different relationship they establish with their ex-rodeo-star father, Ace Bonner (Robert Preston) and also with their mother. The film explores how Junior is Ace's favourite and, despite Curly's prosperity, he comes a poor second in his father's affection. This is clearly confirmed by Junior's buddy-like relation with his father- he calls him Ace - and by the complicity that binds them together. The same affection can be seen in relation to Ellie, whose world-weary demeanour suggests a mixture of warmth and complacence in relation to both Ace and Junior, who mirror each other in many ways. The scene where the family gets together at the dinner table seems to be fraught with tension: Junior gobbles the food with great appetite whereas Ruth, Curly's wife, chides Ellie for smoking while feeding the children. The camera lingers on Junior's plate for periods, his voracious appetite is emphasised - he even soaks bread in the gravy - while all the time Ruth expresses nothing but disdain through her derisive comments. The latter's attitude shows her resentment against a brother-in-law who elicts such awe and admiration - even from her own children - while her hard-working husband is disfavored by her in-laws. The focus on Junior's act of eating may also suggest not only his homesickness but can also point to his vitality and potency. This might shed some light on Ruth's resentment and the feeling that, although she

despises Junior's nomadic life, she feels some attraction to his unfettered manhood. Part of the film's pathos is that Curly feels it too.

Junior's allegiance to the past is confirmed by his commitment to a way of life which captures, through the repetitions of a ritualized rodeo show, a romanticized vision of the old West. In this sense, the idea that "if you've seen one rodeo, you've seen them all", as Ruth remarks, exposes the ritualization upon which rodeos are predicated. Richard Hutson observes:

> The rodeo is an aura or relic of a past, but it is a kind of presence of the past, a past that has been capable of ritualization so that it can be maintained because it holds within it a set of values that may not be even clearly known any longer, may not be able to be stated or articulated in any other way than the ritual. What does it mean to ritualize the unritualizable chaos? The modern world is this super rationalization and excessive ordering of culture so that it can ritualize chaos, but this ritual chaos of the rodeo is one of the few historical traces left from the heritage of the frontier experience. The rodeo cowboy, as the "hero of repetition", is committed to simulation, and this simulated entertainment is a direct link to the cattle ranching frontier of the past (160).

As in Altman's *Buffalo Bill and the Indians,* the past is frozen in ritualized representations so that history can be appropriated for consumption in ersatz re-enactments of the original. Prescott's Frontier-day parade and its advertising boards "Stay cowboy" dramatize a fantasy of the past which enacts what Baudrillard would call a simulacrum, a hyper real which has lost sight of its referent but goes on as a "precession of simulacra" (1994: 1). Thus, the parade with its symbols of the past, like horses and cowboys, while attempting to pay homage to the idealized West, is also entwined with the marketing, profit-sourced dynamic that progress entails. Curly himself is seen on his Rancheros advertising truck, his new entrepreneurial venture, meting out hotdogs and refreshments. This vision is offset by Junior and Ace riding on the same horse and supposedly endorsing the values of the old West. Curiously, they stray away from the parade route and ride through backyards, getting entangled in clothes lines, falling off their horse in an aborted evocation of frontier freedom. That they stop at a railroad facing the tracks, sitting on a bench and musing on closed off expectations and dreams, is a sign of their paralysis and failure. In fact, Ace's delusions of grandeur have resulted in broken dreams and a meagre existence, living on a

son's weekly allowance. He sold off his land to Curly below the market price to pursue the fantasy of prospecting for silver in Arizona. The money was squandered on women and gambling but he stills harbors a belief in a new frontier, "to fantasize a step beyond the closed-off opportunities" (Hudson: 156). Ace's womanizing, his prodigal behavior, is transmitted through his flamboyance which seeks to captivate everyone around him. Robert Preston's performace suits the character's exuberance and contrasts with McQueen's taciturn restraint.

As Ace reminisces about the past and the old timers who used to be rodeo riders he echoes Steve and Gil's brooding conversations on their past and mutual acquaintances who dwindled and died. His blithely delivered question "if this world is just for the winners, what's for the losers?" may point to his own perception that he has indeed failed on many different fronts. However, it is Junior who provides the answer: "Someone's gotta hold the horses!" attempting to disavow failure. Likewise, after failing at the steer-wrangling competition and facing Ace's disappointment with his comment "We could have won!" Junior cheers himself up by remarking "We did Ace, we did" stressing that their joining together at the rodeo is a triumphant reinforcement of their bond and of their clinging to an anachronistic way of life. Significantly McQueen's strongly masculine persona outshines the pot-bellied Jon Don Baker's image - as a reliable but unglamorized breadwinner - and explains why Bonner comes off as an object of display and desire. He has "stayed cowboy", something which may even be of interest in his brother's salesman pitch: "Big cowboy like you- sincere. Why, you are as genuine as the sunshine" he states, while attempting to coax him into partnership in his Rancheros mobile housing business. Even Ellie serves his profit-seeking purposes where he put her in charge of an antique store, trading on mementos of the past by breaking it up into pieces and selling it, as Curly himself has done to his father's land. Ironically, Junior, despite his allegiance to "staying cowboy", no longer rides the range: he pulls his horse in a trailer, he is a highway cowboy who no longer rides westward.

The images of Ace's place being destroyed by the monstrous bulldozers convey an idea of an engulfing technology in such a way that human communication is obstructed by unbearable noise and the working men, with their mute expressions and sunglasses, perched on top of massive earth-movers, become an indistinct part of the overwhelming

mechanization. It becomes relevant that Ace's fragile old homestead, with its half-torn, scattered photographs and broken frames (which Junior fondles with some regret) is ironically opposed to Curly's mobile homes, a symbol of up-to-dateness and rootlessness, of what Bauman calls "liquid modernity" (Bauman 2000: 8). And yet, the nostalgia the film projects is paralyzing and regressive. If we think what both Junior and Ace's lives have amounted to, we too might ask: what's for the losers? In fact, Junior is offered a job twice, once by Curly and on another occasion by Buck, who tells him he needs an assistant with experience. He refuses both, preferring a life of wandering and physical challenges. His hometown is warm in its welcoming of these rodeo stars, Ace and Junior's connection seems to be affectionately recognised by others and even Curly elicits our sympathy, as his love for his brother is genuine: to Junior's punching him, he responds later by hitting him in the jaw, a fact that the former accepts as a fair settling of their differences.

23. Junior (Steve McQueen) and Ace (Robert Preston): both musing over their lack of a future.

Junior's successful taming of Sunshine and his generous final gesture of buying his father a first class flight to Australia suggest the way both father and son feed on narcissistic fantasies of self-sufficiency. The freeze frames in the ending sequence - recalling the same technique used at the beginning which foregrounded his spectacular struggle with Sunshine, as Junior says goodbye and sets off to another rodeo show - emphasise the emotional, affect-based nature of the film, to use Plantinga's terminology (2009: 8).

Nostalgia and melancholia are natural feelings here (Jackson: 1986), the former stemming from the grief and sadness fostered by homesickness.[45] We might say that Junior nostalgically mourns a physical and figurative home - symbolized by the obliteration of Ace's place - but I also contend that he relishes the journey, he prefers to live in the past rather than to put down roots in the present. In Ruti's words:

> Narcissistic desire is by definition melancholy in that it tends to fixate on specific objects because these objects serve as an adequate substitute for what the subject has or (imagines having) lost in the past (656).

She also observes something about melancholia which I believe helps to explain Junior and Ace's clinging to an idealized past and Peckinpah's glamorization of their failure:

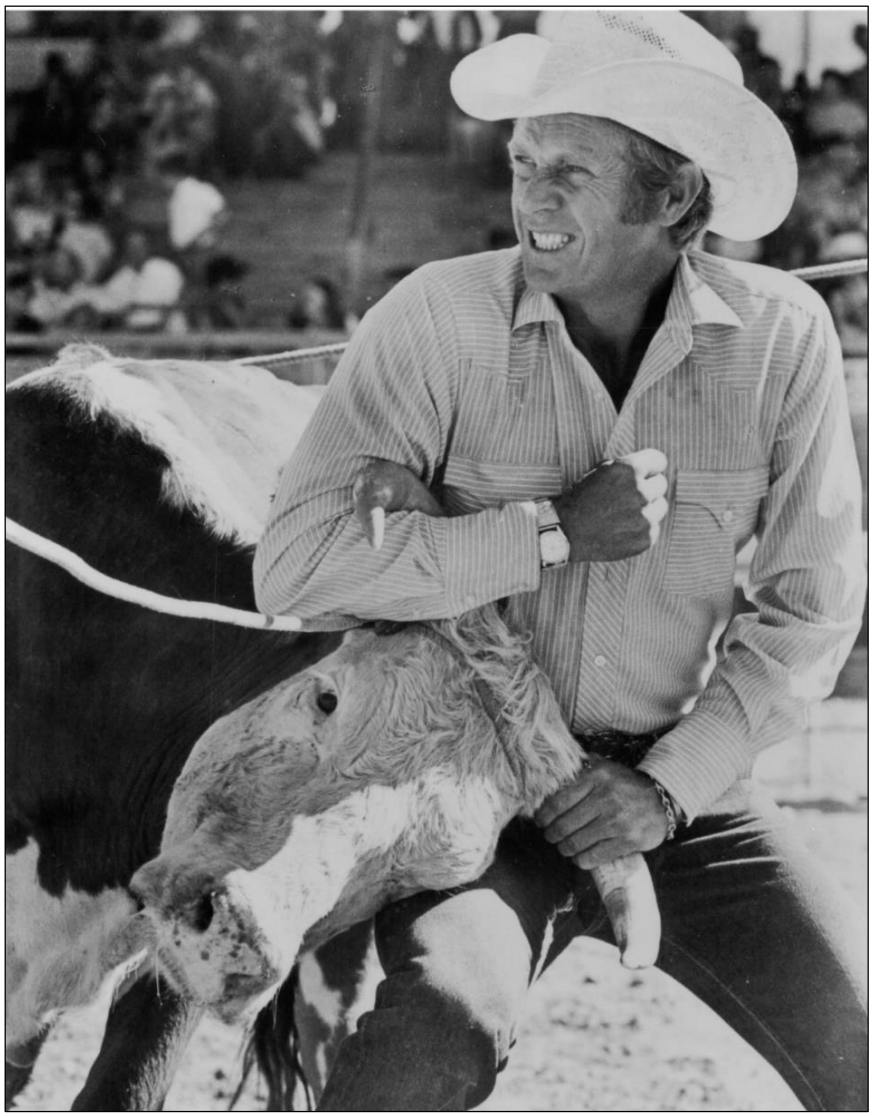
> The problem with melancholia is that the melancholy subject expects the present to provide an entirely loyal reflection of its past desires - expects the present to reincarnate the past with picture-perfect accuracy. The subject who has managed to prevail over melancholia, in contrast, knows that even if its present desire is driven by the losses and sacrifices of the past, the present can never entirely redeem the past. It is only when we understand this fundamental insight that we can begin to build an ethical bridge between our past and present desires so as to enter into genuinely loving responsibilities with others - that we can take responsibility for the shape of our desire in any meaningful sense (658).

Both father and son seem incapable of letting go of the past and working through their feelings of loss in the sense that this implies moving forward and being capable of change.

[45] Jackson argues that nostalgia , like " lovesickness and religious melancholia" were first seen as subtypes of melancholia (1986:155) and Bell tracing the origins of nostalgia argues that "a regionally distinct form of melancholia is afforded by the early history of nostalgia" (2014: 111) as it was first perceived as a "disease peculiar to Swiss mercenary soldiers" (111) who suffered from homesickness.

Insofar as they idealize the past, their desire clings to it since as Ruti also states "In narcissistic love, the death of desire therefore begins with the death of the ideal" (657).

The film echoes William A. Fraker's *Monte Walsh* (1970) where Lee Marvin, cast against his usual ruthless type, plays the role of an ageing cowboy who, together with a friendly Jack Palance, attempts desperately to stay cowboy, although the times have changed and their way of life is at a low ebb. Like Junior he is given other employment opportunities working in a Wild West show, garbed in clownish attire and displaying his mastery at bronco busting, but he refuses to do this, claiming that he "will not spit on his whole life". That he ends up roaming the mountains alone and talking with his horse is suggestive of the dearth of prospects and the broken promises that the future reserves for these wandering cowboys. Having gone down their own road, their journey is a solitary, desolate one. Through *Junior Bonner,* Peckinpah proves that he could return to his favorite themes without showcasing the violent sequences which made him notorious. Released immediately after the violent *Straw Dogs*, the film seems to be a melancholy farewell to the old West and, in its elegiac mood, articulates Peckinpah's emotional attachment to the memories of the times he had spent on his grandfather's ranch, listening to stories about rodeo stunts and tall tales of cowboys' feats. Like Junior Bonner, he is unwilling to let it go.



24. Junior Bonner: a rodeo star still holding on to the romanticized past of the old frontier days.

iii- Melancholia and the nihilism of war in *Cross of Iron*

"I believe God is a sadist but probably doesn't even know it."
Sergeant Steiner (James Coburn) in *Cross of Iron* (1977)

Although Peckinpah was particularly attuned to the Western, he ventured into other genres, transposing into other contexts his bitter vision of the world. *Cross of Iron* (1977) is one such example where the concepts of honor, betrayal, male bonding and, interestingly social class, are called upon, providing us with a grim portrayal of humanity set against World War II. The film revolves around a platoon of German soldiers trying to survive on the Russian front, having their mettle tested in unpredictable but clearly losing conflicts. Garner Simmons stated:

> In taking the project Peckinpah saw an opportunity to make an atypical war film. Set against the battle of Krymskaya, which took place in Southern Russia near the Back Sea in mid-1943 the novel sought to dramatize the disastrous retreat in the face of the Soviet offensive. By portraying the Germans as protagonists, Peckinpah felt he had a chance to make an anti-war statement unlike any other (1998: 224).

Apart from the - by then - normative climate of animosity between Peckinpah and his producer Wolf Hartwig,[46] the film is no less marked by Peckinpah's melancholy leanings as his main character Sergeant Steiner (James Coburn) mulls over the absurdity and futility of war and, albeit driven on by a battle-weary sense of duty and honor, acknowledges that he hates "all officers","all the Iron Cross scavengers", even upbraiding his superior Colonel Brandt (James Mason) by saying "Do you know how much I hate this uniform and what it stands for?" The strangeness of having a war movie focusing on German soldiers and not on American ones allowed a more abstract approach to the topic. Prince observes:

> Despite his sharp historical sense and his loathing for the fascism of Hitler's Germany, Peckinpah nevertheless agreed to go to Yugoslavia and make this film about German soldiers on the Russian front. But his political position necessitated that the material be de-Nazified. Thus, Sergeant Steiner (James Coburn) and his platoon are presented as soldiers bereft of a political ideology and who merely want to survive the violence

[46] Weddle describes the latter as a "German purveyor of soft-core pornography films who yearned to break into legitimate features" (1994: 504)

> and madness around them. Peckinpah acknowledged that the film had an apolitical design (154).

The centrality of male bonding is suggested by Steiner's commitment to his platoon and his concern over his companions' lives. His melancholy bearing hints at his recognition of the sense of purposelessness and absurdity of the violent missions he carries out, as can be seen when, looking at the dead bodies of Russian soldiers barely in their teens, he observes bitterly: "Nothing we haven't seen before". His sense of duty, shorn of self-aggrandizing intentions, is set against Captain Stransky (Maximilian Schell), an ambitious, glory-seeking officer who desires an Iron Cross and who immediately pulls rank when he meets Steiner. In the same line of West-Point stiffness epitomized by characters like Owen Thursday in Ford's *Fort Apache* or the ludicrous Colonel Breed (Robert Ryan) in Aldrich's *Dirty Dozen*, Stransky pursues his aims even if that implies double-crossing Steiner and his platoon, holding back information which would help them to return safely from their reconnaissance mission. The idea of betrayal sets in and Stransky, like Pat Garrett, seeks recognition from his superiors by trying to force Steiner into subscribing to a eulogizing, but false, account of his role in the counterattack that drove the Russians back. Steiner realizing that it was another soldier, Meyer, who had sacrificed his life while Stransky had in a cowardly manner stayed out of the line of fire, refuses to sign. The opposition between the two is brought to a head by Steiner's contempt for Stransky's Prussian aristocratic background.

In a very telling scene, Stransky boasts about his privileged heritage stating that even in the military world, men are differentiated by "blood and class differences" while Steiner's rebuts this reasoning by claiming "talent, sensitivity and character" seem to be no longer "privileges of the so-called upper classes". Interestingly, Peckinpah seems here to be drawn into inspecting class distinctions, something which he had heretofore left untouched. It is revealing that Stransky, recalling the privilege of generals in Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957), treats the soldiers who are fighting his campaign with contempt. His interests are personal and his actions guided by manipulation. Steiner, in turn, is committed to his men, his bunch, and to the missions he is assigned. As Colonel Brandt's adjuvant, Captain Kiesel (David

Warner) observes: “Steiner is a myth, but men like him are our last hope and in that sense he is a truly dangerous man”. Steiner espouses the bunch-mentality in the same vein as so many other American protagonists, contemptuous of authority - like Lee Marvin in The *Dirty Dozen* - and indifferent to hierarchies, flouting the rule book as an impediment to effective action. Despite his combat-induced nihilism, Steiner’s residual humanity is affirmed by his saving the life of a young Russian soldier, and rejecting Stranksy’s orders when he demands prisoners be shot, taking him into the dug-out shelter where he and his men live in makeshift conditions. Later he releases the boy only to see him machine-gunned as Russian soldiers waylay them. His tired resignation is dramatized by his musing remarks: “I think God is a sadist, but probably doesn’t even know it”. “Take that uniform”, he pleads with the boy, adding: “there’s always another one underneath”.

Cross of Iron is profoundly melancholy in the sense that it favours moments of introspection and philosophizing about human existence over scenes of action. This attention to the self, the reflexive, ruminative stance, as Michael Bell suggests - and as has also been referred to on page 160 - is one of the main traces of melancholia. Despair begets awareness. He writes:

> Melancholia, or at least the psychological symptoms of melancholia as reported from Hippocrates right down through Western history, depends upon the West’s peculiarly *introspective culture. The psychological symptoms of melancholia are, to put it crudely, a disorder of malignant self-consciousness* (xi). (my italics)

He also adds:

> We experience the florid psychological symptoms of melancholia because our culture encourages us to attend to the state of our inner life. Self-conscious attention exacerbates the cognitive symptoms of the malaise and turns it into full-blown psychological melancholia. It gives fear and sadness a cognitive dimension, turning them into paranoia, self-loathing and pessimism (184).

Many films have relied on the “war as hell” trope but *Cross of Iron* goes beyond clichéd visions by offering unique moments of introspection, inwardness and loss. Moreover, the mechanisms of memory are often brought to light by Peckinpah’s montage technique,

imparting an almost surreal quality to the narrative where the past blurs into the present and painful moments resurface as glimpses of "unresolved grief" (Eng and Han 2000: 669). As has been observed, in his seminal essay Freud argued that melancholia can not only result from the loss of a "beloved person" but also from more abstract, less corporeal objects such as those represented by ideals. Steiner's bitterness suggests that he is bereft of ideals, and thus his melancholia has fostered a "keener eye for the truth" since he has forsaken any kind of idealism that might give sense to his mission. He carries out orders because it is his duty and not because he sees any purpose in them. Ruti states:

> The melancholy subject remains enmeshed in an alternative world - a world that it may in real life have given up, but that keeps resurfacing as a highly charged space of dreams, fantasies, and imaginary constructs. The subject may do its best to go along with the concrete concerns of its everyday existence yet find itself taken over by sudden visitations from the past. At such moments, the subject catches a glimpse of a peculiar psychic reality that may momentarily seem more viscerally compelling than its actual life (646).

This might explain why so many war films feature soldiers who cling to the past and remain incapable of living the present. There is no possibility of foreclosing on sorrow since melancholia "dwells in the past in ways that hold this past open and unresolved" (Ruti: 646) Post-traumatic stress disorder is after all an open wound which prevents the moving forward of traumatized, split subjectivities. This might explain why Steiner, having the possibility of going back home on leave, after having suffered a severe concussion, prefers to rejoin his men again, giving up on the opportunity to start afresh a new life, away from the battle field. When he is wounded and taken to hospital, he has a brief dalliance with a nurse, Eva, played by Senta Berger. Here the film relies on a staple of the genre where women are often construed as temporary solace during men's convalescence.

25. Steiner (James Coburn) finding some solace with Eva (Senta Berger) before going back to the war zone.

As in *Major Dundee*, the nurse represents a healing respite from the bruises of war but also an emasculating, feminized world from which Steiner eventually escapes, preferring the company of his all-male platoon to the possibility of a home, "our home" as she tentatively offers him. Her charge "Do you love the war so much? Is that what's wrong with you or are you afraid of what you will be without it?" is received with meaningful silence, hinting at the truth of her words. His allegiance is above all else to his own platoon. Dundee's statement "men understand fighting, they sometimes need it, the truth is that it is easy" holds good here too. In fact, Dukore argues that what had remained inconsistent in *Major Dundee*, especially the relationship between Teresa and Amos Dundee, is rendered "dramatically credible and thematically apposite" (2012: 55) in *Cross of Iron*. In Dukore's view, Peckinpah seems to finally round out "the healing process of the military men" (55) in the latter film, even by making Steiner's rehabilitation - punctuated by a striking montage where his blurred recollections of the past signal his mental confusion and shell shock - the object of detailed graphic attention. In her analysis of Vietnam films and the way they

depict masculinity, Susan Jeffords argues that men in their collective bonding are defined against women and the dangers of un-manning they represent:

> In such a context, the female must by necessity be excluded from the enactment and maintenance of this community. Representing the body, the appetitive, necessity, the domestic, and the mundane, the female stands in direct contradistinction to that which the masculine presents itself as being: the abstract, the immortal, the unchanging, the public (1989: 61).

One of the strongest indictments of the war that the film offers is the scene when patients are visited by officers of higher ranks. While extending his hand to a young soldier, one of these officers is confronted with the disturbing sight of the soldier's amputated arm. Visibly discomfited, the officer holds out the other hand only to be surprised by another stump that the soldier displays defiantly. Finally this young man stretches his leg forward in a mocking and challenging parody of a salute. That this young amputee exposes his crippled arms and even indulges in dry humor, jeering at the officer's futile gesture, point strikingly to the physical and psychological damages that war inflicts on the lives of young soldiers. This scene is a deliberate echo of the trauma of Vietnam and the number of soldiers who returned home physically maimed and emotionally devastated.

Peckinpah's presentation of this all-male platoon suggests a melancholy recognition that violence is a constant in the affairs of men, and these soldiers pose a physical threat to women because of their sexually predatory and primeval instincts. When Steiner and his platoon come up against a group of Russian female soldiers headquartered in an old farm, his men need to be brought to heel by Steiner's authority. Their first impulse is one of rape: one of the soldiers climbs into the wooden barrel where one of the female soldiers is bathing only to be pulled out by Steiner who berates him: "Pick up your weapon". Things go awry as the men can hardly control their bestial instincts. Zoll, an intruder in the platoon whose presence was imposed by Nazi political interests, is castrated by one of the women in the group when forcing her into fellatio, whereas the young private Dietz is manipulated by another female soldier's seductive tactics and stabbed to death. The whole scene becomes violent and the young woman's pain at performing the act is perceived by her anguished expression. This scene acquires an unsavory quality portraying men's sexuality

as threatening and violent and offering a disturbing view of male/female relationships which will be further discussed in relation to Peckinpah's misogyny. This remains one of the most unsettling scenes in the film - partly because it is so unnecessary and implausible (stumbling upon a platoon of female Russian soldiers bathing?), surpassing the horror of graphic shell explosions and the blood squibs by implying men's ready recourse to rape under conditions of war.

Neil Fulwood argues that the film is a "technical *tour de force*" (125), demonstrating Peckinpah's artistry with editing and his sharp expertise in working with stock footage. In a *cinema verité*, documentary style the film begins by intercutting between real life, black and white images of Hitler, the Nazi-party parades and the fictional universe of cinematic representation, as we see Steiner standing with his binoculars - evoking the first image of Dundee scanning his surroundings. Violence breaks out as the action expands into visually striking battle scenes. David Weddle states that the endless arguments over production costs and Hartwig's backing off from his initial promises[47] threw Peckinpah into a "terrible bender and his direction would become erratic and confused" (1996: 507). Marshall Fine also emphasizes that "*Cross of Iron* took its toll on Peckinpah, physically and artistically" (304). Peckinpah's growing instability and his dilatory approach to shooting might have created a sense of *dejá vu* in some of the battle scenes and shell explosions. The film's grim tone however still evidences Peckinpah's negativism and his deeply ingrained melancholia. When, by the end of the film, Steiner, having lost all of his companions, eventually prods Stransky into counterattacking, claiming that he will see "where the Iron Crosses grow", the latter's ineptitude is thrown into relief as he is incapable even of reloading his rifle. Steiner's laughter is the last sound we hear and it echoes through the ending credits, a different laughter from the Bunch's celebratory laughter at the end of *The Wild Bunch*. Steiner laughs dryly and bitterly at the futility of all wars, at all the Iron Cross-scavengers who like Stransky ignore the nightmarish, reality of danger by invoking rank. The stiff generals of *Paths of Glory* who had cynically observed "your men died wonderfully" might

[47] Fine states that "The tanks were a constant source of irritation. Aside from Hartwig's cheapness, there was a simple question of availability. There were only so many vintage World War II tanks in working order available in Europe. Most of them had been spoken for by Sir Richard Attenborough, who was shooting *A Bridge Too Far* in the Netherlands (298).

be construed as the forbear of Peckinpah's officer class. Coronel Brandt's question "what will we do when we lose the war?" is answered with bitter irony by Kiesel's disaffected cynicism "we will start another one". This explains the Brecht quote in the film's final credit: "Don't rejoice in his defeat, you men. For though the world stood up and stopped the bastard, the bitch that bore him is in heat again". Peckinpah's disgust at the Vietnam War and his public attack on the My Lai massacre cover up, can be projected onto the violence which this film shows. As Fulwood observes: "In *Cross of Iron*, violence is continual: every conversation, every briefing, every verbal stand-off between Steiner and Stransky takes place to a backdrop of artillery fire (126). And underlying all this, is Steiner's un-mourned losses and the bankruptcy of purposeful, regenerative, action. Eng and Han argue that melancholia can not only be felt in individual subjects, and their clinging to unresolved grief, but it may also translate a collective feeling of loss becoming also a "national" (672) phenomenon. Although they claim that this grieving, "this mourning without end" (670), can stem from a feeling of racial, sexual exclusion from hegemonic cultural patterns, I would contend that war, and its demands on a paradigm of strong masculinity, can also cause a collective feeling of unmourned loss, and recalling Freud's theory, this loss can take the shape of an ideal that crumbles when the purpose of action is rendered futile. This brings to mind the traumatic loss in Vietnam which America could only later narrativize, mitigating defeat, thus allowing melancholia to express itself in its most creative aspects. In this sense, if, as Ruti suggests, the way to process pain implies an "appreciation for the myriad ways in which suffering over time yields to wisdom" (654), the process through which the subject may move forward from his/her melancholy fixations is through language. Ruti expounds on this:

> We all enter this world devoid of depth and understanding, and the course of individuation that takes place throughout our lives entails the gradual assimilation of experiences that are designed to teach us how to live. This course of individuation remains incomplete without our ability to process pain, which is one reason that the analytic process so often entails learning how to properly mourn the losses of the past. What I have begun to suggest here is that this process of mourning entails the subject's capacity to exchange its melancholy attachments for the meaning-making capacities of the signifier (653).

However, the nihilism underlying *Cross of Iron*, voiced so many times in Steiner's epigrammatic, philosophizing comments, precludes this meaning-making process since the film's agenda is to portray the absurdity of war. Thus, despite all the action set-pieces, there is a sense of paralysis, of a *cul-de-sac* predicament, since loss is never foreclosed upon but, on the contrary, it is fetishized and, as such, it prevents any possibility of processing pain through meaning-making practices. Like the rodeo, which is a simulacrum of the old West, the iron cross is a simulacrum of valor, a fetish which precludes moving on. Here it becomes a cross of iron with its sense of steely martyrdom, evoking Billy's symbolic crucifixion in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid.*

iv- Melancholia and male disempowerment in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*

"Nobody loses all the time."
Bennie[48] (Warren Oates) in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974)

Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia is perhaps the least admired of Peckinpah's *auteurist* films. It was seen as excessive and unconscionable, a gothic tale of revenge which provided neither a sense of justice nor catharsis through violence. It is also one of the grimmest and the most melancholy portrayals of human endeavor and therefore it deserves a prominent place in any reflection on melancholia. Peckinpah manifested great enthusiasm for the project right from its inception, when Frank Kowalsky first approached him with the idea. As quoted by Garner Simmons, he recalled:

> Driving up to make Cable Hogue, Frank Kowalsky presented me with the initial idea. He said: I got a great title: *Bring me the head of*…., - and he had some other name - and the hook is that the guy is already dead. I thought the idea was sensational. We worked on it both here and then in England when I was making *Straw Dogs*. But it was finally Gordy Dawson who collaborated with me on the shooting script (1998: 189).

The idea of a "guy" who is already dead captured Peckinpah's attention. The film's narrative is predicated on a death-related fetish and so it chimes in with the underlying depressive undertones that can be perceived in much of Peckinpah's work. *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* seems to me to be the culmination of the pessimism which colours *Straw Dogs* and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*.

The film starts with an unexpectedly peaceful tableau but, knowing Peckinpah's *oeuvre* and his fondness for flouting spectators' expectations, one might perceive this peacefulness presages violence. As the credits roll, the image of a young woman, Theresa - played by Janine Maldonado - resting her back on a fallen log, her feet moving gracefully in the water of a lake is framed in a long shot which captures the ducks and geese floating by, the camera moves closer and one can see she is pregnant. She caresses her protruding belly, attentive

[48] I have used the spelling as in the original film release. Some sources use Benny.

to the changes in her body and what seems a moment of serene musing is broken abruptly when she is summoned by her father's henchmen. El Jefe, played by Emilio Fernandez, Peckinpah's favorite roguish Mexican, is reading a psalm in Latin surrounded by an entourage of black-clad women, members of the clergy and his own gun-wielding thugs. The close-up on a woman's face, apparently the young woman's mother, reveals too tense an expression to be one of religious reverence. This woman is in a state of terror. The camera pans and lingers on the paintings hanging on the wall, representing austerity and stale family traditions set against the girl's youth and freshness. The presence of the priest and nuns align the power of the church with corruption and violence and suggest the hypocrisy that pervades the ceremonial gathering. *Quién es el padre?*[sic] El Jefe's severe guttural question demands the young woman confess but the latter responds with a defiant silence; at El Jefe's cue the hoodlums proceed to rip off her dress baring her breasts but she remains mute and so the scene acquires a strangely sexual undertone. As she remains adamant in her silence, what follows is too shocking a scene to be viewed: the image fades out and we listen to the young woman's screams as her arm is broken. "Alfredo Garcia" she hollers in pain. The image of a tearful El Jefe bewailing "he was like a son to me" helps construe Alfredo's act as one of disloyalty and betrayal, a cardinal sin in Peckinpah's world, and even amongst the most amoral of his characters, revenge is the necessary response. When a slick, dapper gringo approaches the girl and raises her chin one might expect some words of comfort but this gentleness shifts into aggression as he yanks the locket off Theresa's neck. Alfredo's grinning face is shown in a photo; appropriately it is his head which takes up most of the image. There is a sense of clichéd exaggeration in all this as the representation of Mexicans is close to parody and they become cartoonish-like figures.

The bounty that El Jefe puts on Alfredo Garcia's head gives an unexpected and abrupt jolt in the narrative, as several cars spill out of the hacienda's gate, a plane is seen taking off and what had appeared displaced in time is now cast in a contemporary light with up-to-date bounty hunters chasing their target. Until this moment, nothing could have prepared us for the historical grounding of the narrative. As Simons and Merrill state:

> When are the events we witness taking place? The eighteenth century, the nineteenth century of most filmed Westerns, or the twentieth century, as proves to

> be the case? The ambiguous historical moment of the film underscores Peckinpah's obsessive theme of conflicting spatial-temporal realms, the old and the new sparring with each other, and it is appropriate that for the first and last time in a Peckinpah film all events take place in Mexico, for Peckinpah the site in which these conflicting realms are most conspicuously in evidence (157).

Max (Helmut Dantine), who plays the gringo who had pulled the young woman's locket, his accountant Frank (Don Levy) and Sappensly (Robert Webber) and Quill (Gil Young), followed by two Mexican lower minions, Chalo (Chalo Gonzalez) and Cueto (Jorge Russek) arrive in Mexico City looking for Garcia. Paying visits to different hotels and clubs, Sappensly and Quill end up meeting Bennie (Warren Oates), a down-on-his-luck, seedy piano player who is first seen playing and singing "Guantanamera" for a group of tourists in a sleazy bar. "Take me to your leader", he remarks when, in exchange for information, they bait him with a dollar bill. One clearly perceives Bennie's desperate situation. Surrounded by visual props alluding to Mexican history (like Zapata's photos on the wall), his story has been one of downfall, a clownish figure entertaining tourists curious about cultural difference. Falling easy prey to the thugs' enticements, his venality is further enhanced by the dollar bill on the wall featuring Nixon's face. Interestingly, Nixon's image appears again on the cover of a *Time* magazine that Max holds. In a world deprived of any moral anchors, Nixon appears as the epitome of deviousness and opportunism, symbolizing the political corruption that Peckinpah so often criticized (Prince: 1998).

Having worked with Peckinpah previously, Warren Oates had always played far from heroic or glamorous characters. His persona is defined by slightly manic, perverse and half-witted characters (in *The Wild Bunch* he is one of the scurrilous Gorch brothers, the one who has a "wanted for rape" bill on his head, and in *Ride the High Country* he borders on imbecility, but not altogether divested of a sense of predatory sexual danger. As Prince states: "Benny is Peckinpah's ultimate loser, the grimmest and most haunted of his tragic fools" (151). Moreover, physically unglamorous, Oates belongs to a line of actors - like Hoffman but perhaps without his acting range – whose unappealing looks may suggest a flawed morality. Kitses writes for example:

> *Garcia*'s Benny is no hero but rather the consummate loser, a two-bit peckerwood, a not-so-innocent ugly American down and out in Mexico, a scruffy refuge from a John Huston movie, a savage waiting to happen. Casting has never been more definitive: Warren Oates is ideal for a man too small for life's challenges, a ham-and-egger, the ironic hero *par excellence* (2004: 241).

In contrast to Bennie's shabby appearance as well, Quill and Sappensly stand out in relation to the other bounty hunters not only for their slick, polished manners but also for the sense of more sophisticated nastiness they emanate; moreover, their connection hints at a veiled homosexual-couple as guessed from Sappensly's violence against women as he knocks off with his elbow the prostitute who attempts to fondle his crotch at Bennie's club. Their misogyny is also perceived when, asked if they would buy a drink for the ladies, Quill's sarcastic answer "Burro's piss?" discloses his contempt for or lack of interest in women. When both leave the club Bennie asks Quill's name, to which he ironically answers, "Dobbs… Fred C. Dobbs". Alluding to the greedy character played by Humphrey Bogart in one of Peckinpah's favorite films, John Huston's *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* (1948), Quill is bringing into play Bennie's similarities with the greed-driven Dobbs.

26. Bennie in the sleazy bar where he works, displaying signs of Mexican culture like the "Viva Zapata" stitched on his jacket.

When Bennie walks into the hotel where El Jefe's sleek representatives are headquartered, his image is captured in a huge mirror in the entrance lobby but it is also perceived as slightly off-kilter, distorted and suggestively dwarfed in the distance. In Peckinpah's universe, mirrors are an important device to suggest undercurrents of meaning in the narrative and especially characters' confrontation with their own guilt-ridden subjectivity. In this particular instance, Bennie's out-of-focus image signals his immersion in a world that will bring about his alienation. He is derided as "another loser" by Frank and though he retorts that "nobody loses all the time" his image shows that this might not be so. The hasty way he tucks the two hundred dollars in his shirt pocket, unhooking the mismatching, shoddy tie, which he proceeds to carry in his hand while he walks out the room, point to his mediocrity. At this stage in the narrative, he seems confident that his luck will change, that he has finally found his golden "fleece". Bennie's ubiquitous wearing of sunglasses hints at his own incapacity to face "the light", functioning as a kind of mask which hinders his apprehension of events and the dire consequences of his decisions. Moreover, they are a comic twist on the character's unglamorous nature and an ironic touch on his moral "blindness". The light, which he refuses to face, stems from his own relationship with Elita, played by the Mexican actress Isela Vega. As some critics have mentioned, (Simons and Merrill, 2011), Elita could represent a way out of his own autistic dreams of "moving up". Her feelings for him are genuine and she seems content with their being together. Moreover, she voices the objections to his wrong-headed plans to desecrate Garcia's grave and sever his head. When she first appears, she is surrounded by a coterie of admirers for whom she sings in Spanish; her image is captured from behind, stirring the spectator's curiosity. As is soon realized, her occupation as singer and prostitute place her in the same social position as Bennie but she is capable of espousing a set of values which will prevent her from deceptive dreams of grandeur. It is from her that he learns Garcia died in a car accident - after confessing her three-day cold was actually a drawn-out goodbye to her erstwhile lover - and it is with her that he embarks on the journey that will have such destructive consequences.

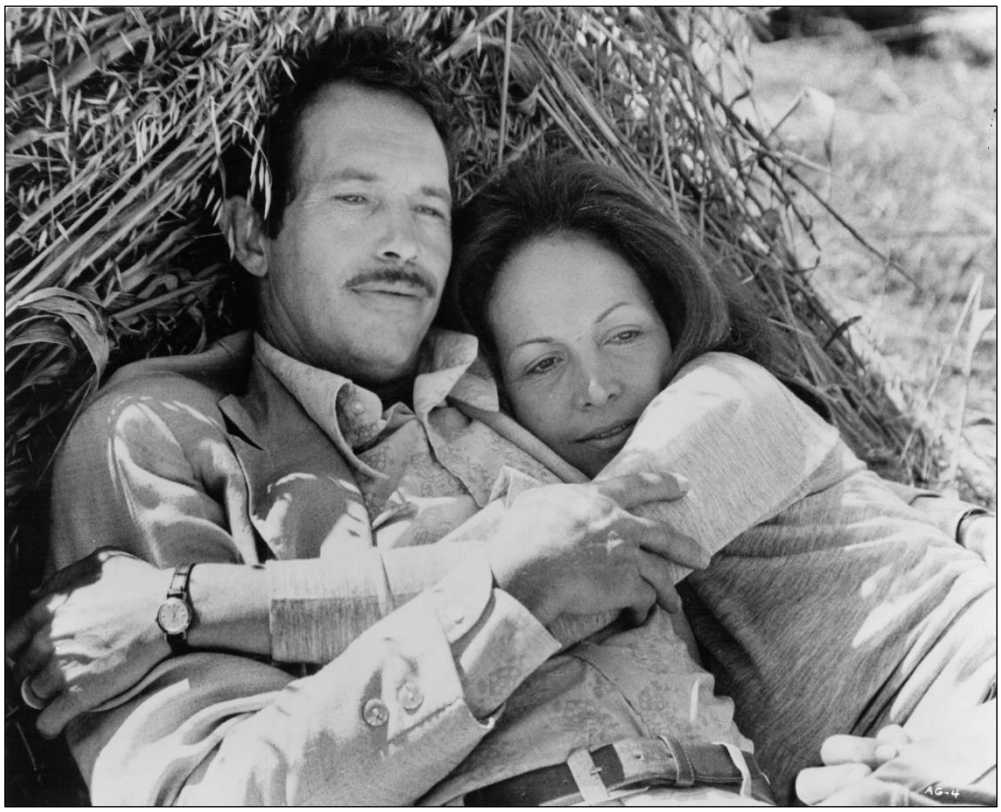
The scene before departure where Bennie lies in bed with Elita, in his sleazy room, has her naked, highlighting her vulnerability through bodily exposure. Elita is still unaware of

Bennie's vicious plans as she lies asleep in his bed; his discovery of lice in his crotch and his dousing of his genitals with tequila point to the squalidness of their existence. The same run-down hotel rooms, the same tequila-induced alienation underscore the sordidness of Bennie's life. As they leave, the camera captures in a long shot the *barrio* in which he lives, the image suggesting squalor. Gabrielle Murray sees something more life-affirming in this scenario:

> Together they leave Benny's flat which we see is one among many. The building's exterior is shabby and dilapidated, but we hear laughing, yelling, and music playing. Neighbours greet them, hang out their washing, chat and mind children. The walls of the building are painted in a light, bright acqua blue. Lines and lines of laundry flap in a breeze, and children play ball and run around on the ground wrestling (116).

Murray's view accords with her characterization of Peckinpah's work as intrinsically constructive. I would argue however that the scene points less to a portrait of communal harmony than to the poverty and shabbiness of the environment. The same description could be applied to another of Peckinpah's favorite movies, Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (1950), which despite showing the lively quality of these socially impoverished environments, also bring into focus the oppressive hardships endured by the people who inhabit them. Peckinpah's film then becomes a road movie with Bennie and Elita driving the roads of Mexico: away from the boisterous, Mexican city they come into contact with a more pristine, uncontaminated landscape. But their journey is oftentimes overshadowed by a sense of doom. When they pull over for a picnic and rest underneath a tree, the scene seems like a romantic interlude with Bennie confessing his love for Elita and for the first time, asking her to marry him. This verges on sentimentality allowing Simons and Merrill to state that it is "an immensely poignant moment, perhaps the most intimate moment between a man and a woman in all of Peckinpah's films" (168). Similarly, Crispin Miller also elaborates on the scene's importance:

> We see not a beaming plasticated pair enjoying this or that product in a commercially idealized landscape (as their positions and expressions evoke such billboard tableau) but two broken, confused people trying to realize a happy union. Benny's troubled, aging face, his receding hairline, his wrinkled shirt, Elita's slight lines around the eyes: such things throw us off because they conflict with the scene's general outline of harmonious togetherness (11).



27. Bennie and Elita in their romantic respite: one of the gentlest scenes in this dark film.

Notwithstanding this idyll, the sense of impending danger is writ large as the two Mexican bounty hunters drive by, a close-up on their faces emphasizing their menacing presence. This sets the stage for one of the most bewildering scenes in the film. When their car blows a tire, Bennie and Elita decide to sojourn in open country "under the stars" as she says, but their privacy is abruptly disrupted by two scruffy, long-haired bikers, played by Kris Kristofferson - whose bulging midriff shows his physical decline since playing Billy - and Donnie Fritts, a member of the former's band who had played Beaver in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. Their demeanor recalls the Hammond brothers with regard to Elsa. While the first biker takes Elita away to "have some fun", the second holds Bennie at gunpoint and taunts him with a song about sexual betrayal that drives a man insane. The lurid tone that the scene takes on is reminiscent of *Straw Dogs* and Amy's abuse at the hands of Venner and his lewd accomplice. Kathleen Murphy and Richard T. Jameson state:

> Peckinpah imparts something else to the scene - a sense of complicity between rapist and victim - that stated in those terms merely, would appear to justify the most

> outraged charges against the director as a male chauvinist pig. It isn't that simplified in great movies. Whatever Peckinpah's overall notion of men, women and sexuality may be, this is a particular event with specific participants and a specific dramatic meaning within the scene (as with the much-fumed-over double rape of Amy Sumner in *Straw Dogs*, a multivalenced transaction that cannot be accommodated by generalizations against women) (1981: 46).

When Elita's attacker rips her sweater and her breasts are exposed she slaps him twice on the face, he slaps her back and with unexpected reaction walks away, which seems at odds with a sexual aggressor's expected behavior. Surprisingly Elita follows him and kneeling close to him mutters "no please" while they lie down and embrace. This is what Bennie sees when, after having knocked the other biker on the head, he comes to her rescue. Elita's seeming compliance in her own victimization has dumbfounded critics and spectators. Crispin Miller argues:

> Meanwhile the "rape" itself proceeds in an unusual manner. Kristofferson rips open Elita's shirt as the patriarch's heavies had ripped open the young girl's. Elita is only more beautiful for this ill treatment. For she is too strong to be degraded so easily. She slaps her molester, she slaps him again. He then hauls off and smacks her very hard. Unlike Amy in *Straw Dogs*, who is conquered, although she only gets what she secretly wants, Elita does not give in or crumple up. Surprisingly Kristofferson turns away, hang-dog and mortified, and withdraws sitting beside a dark boulder (12).

Miller's idea rests on the notion that Elita is too strong a woman to be dominated by a man; moreover while emphasizing her beauty as undeserving of this "ill treatment" he erroneously misconstrues El Jefe's daughter's humiliation at the hands of the latter's hoodlums and proceeds to demean Amy's rape by relying on the outrageous idea that she was secretly craving it. Although Miller's text is "in defense of Peckinpah", it fails to identify the equivocal nature of these scenes. In the first place, Elita is far more mature a woman to be placed on the same level as the pregnant, naïve Theresa and secondly the sexual assault of Amy is just as enigmatic as Elita's own apparent acquiescence. David Weddle refers to Peckinpah's fondness for prostitutes and the way he often found their company more comforting and assuaging (perhaps because emotionally less demanding) than the company of other women. Moreover, relying on the Western tradition of the whore-with-

a-heart-of-gold, Peckinpah chooses to cast Elita and Hildy from *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* in a rather positive light. Jim Kitses writes in this context:

> The key irony is, of course, that the action turns not on the rape but on the woman's readiness to betray her lover. Is this possibly her strategy to ensure they survive? Or is Peckinpah indulging stereotypes - the Mexican Elita (Isela Vega) so passionate and compassionate that she opens her heart wide to one in need? Or so emotional and impulsive that she eschews reason. The distance on the scene's staging provides no help in reading the moment, as opposed to the layering of self-disgust we sense in the extreme close-up on the hysterical laughter of Angel's girl, Aurora, who had betrayed him with Mapache in *The Wild Bunch*. Either way, the conception of Elita's character here typically involves her prostitution by the director, her willingness to betray her betrothed muddying the film's morality, as does the hero's crab infested crotch that he discovers after sleeping with her (2004: 242-243).

Kitses's view brings into focus the ambiguity of these events. Does Elita's occupation as a prostitute "equip" her with some resilience and experience in dealing with male aggression? Her answer to Bennie's vengeful intents "I've been here before, you don't know the way" suggests familiarity with these demeaning scenes. Bennie himself despondently confesses "I bet she can deal with this better than me", which points to the same baffling conclusion. Garner Simmons quotes Kristofferson when he commented on the way Peckinpah shifted the mood of the whole scene, underlining how he "took all the macho out of it" (1998: 198). Notwithstanding what seems to have been Peckinpah's intentions, by drawing out the "macho" play, Elita's abuse here recalls a previous moment when in Bennie's room he slaps her with a towel and drags her out of bed. What Murray refers to as a "playful wrestle" (116) comes across as a veiled form of male aggressiveness which asserts its power through physical imposition.

28. Isela Vega, as Elita, and Kris Kristofferson, as the hippy-like rider, during the shooting of the scene of attempted rape.

This moment constitutes a turning point in the narrative; from this moment onwards romantic idylls are impossible to sustain, Elita grows more anxious and Bennie more obsessed with pursuing his warped goal. Whilst rejecting Elita's arguments about the holiness of graves, Bennie states that Al is "our saint, the saint of our money" and that the church "has always cut off their saints' feet and hands" adding later on that "there's nothing sacred about a hole in the ground or a man that's in it".

Bearing in mind that Elita is presented in a positive light throughout the first part of the narrative, her violent death is all the more jarring. As she accompanies Bennie to Garcia's grave and he starts digging to recover his body, he is unexpectedly hit on the head with a shovel and the image fades out for a few seconds only to return with the disturbing scene of the couple half buried in the ground in Garcia's own grave. We discover that they were waylaid by the Mexican bounty hunters, Chalo and Cueto, who were also seeking Garcia's severed head. This has sealed Elita's fate and will unleash Bennie's quest for revenge. The narrative then follows Bennie's plunging into despair, and his deployment of violent means to revenge his lover's death. His journey can be read as the melancholic "abyss of sorrow",

"a non-communicable grief", in Kristeva's description (1989: 3) which bespeaks his despair. His guilt and self-reproaches suggest a morbid melancholic demeanor as he sees himself as having been responsible for the events that precipitated Elita's death.

Bennie is on his own, often talking to the head as his sole companion in a ludicrous parody of Hamlet. He berates Garcia for his tryst with Elita (I hope you enjoyed it… at least I have), and insanely chastises him for his past involvement with the latter: "I'll be damned if she's not keeping the best part of you", comically alluding to her being buried with his body - and genitals - even if the head is missing. These appear, like the sunglasses he always wears, even in bed, unexpected comic elements in a film that conveys at the same time such deep pain. Moreover, Bennie's chastising of a dead man's head seems to enact a sick form of sexual jealousy. The bouts of reproach hint at what Freud described as ambivalent feelings towards the lost object. Hence, the film posits through Bennie's experience of loss the impossibility of overcoming his own attachment from the "what" that the object symbolized, which dooms him to a despairing melancholia as he cannot work through the process of mourning that his loss has set off. Hence, his behavior is subsumed under what we may call, drawing upon Freudian concepts, a death drive. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud argued that "the ego instincts arise from the coming to life of inanimate matter and seek to restore the inanimate state" (2015[1920]: 37). This rationalization seem to acquire a special resonance in Bennie's case inasmuch as in his absurd quest for a dead man's head, he displays a flirtation with death which drives him "to restore his inanimate state". No wonder when he comes round after the bounty hunters' attack, he is half-buried and by implication half-dead. Al's head becomes a surrogate for the instinctual drive towards death, it is seen as abject in its decaying state (which, beset by flies, is never actually shown), constituting the pull that drives Bennie into an infatuation with his own dissolution. By desecrating the grave Bennie overstepped an important boundary, blurring the frontier between the religious and the profane, he is engulfed in abjection. What Kristeva says about abjection is relevant here:

> It is not the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior…any crime

> because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility (1982: 4).

Carrying the head in the same basket which had carried his and Elita's picnic- another comic prop in the narrative - Bennie finally confronts Max and his hirelings. He knows he had been lured by money, "bread, pano, dinero," as he had jokingly told Elita, and seduced by the promise of a better life. Shooting and killing all of El Jefe's thugs in a maelstrom of violence at the hotel penthouse, he sets off to the latter's hacienda and comes up against the unexpected happy tableau of El Jefe's grandson's christening. The patriarch, as in Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972), is brimful with happiness and seems to have forgotten the unfortunate head-issue. Bennie's excruciating guilt becomes even more painfully felt as he realizes that all the bloodshed had been useless and had only brought devastating loss. El Jefe's dismissive remark about the head -"feed him to the pigs"- throws into relief the meaninglessness of his first tyrannical demand, "Bring me the head of Alfredo Garcia", dismissing the affair with callous indifference. El Jefe's attitude launches Bennie into his final bout of violence: as he opens the case and looks at the wads of dollar bills, he has to face the extent of his own venality. In his rage, he starts shooting at El Jefe's aides and egged on by Theresa's avenging, cold plea, "Kill him!" he fires at the old Mexican and finishes him in a blaze of bullets. His final attempt to escape, guided by the young woman, who tries to divert everyone's attention and ushers him into a clear path, is thwarted. Bennie is finally killed by the hail of bullets hitting his car *à la Bonnie and Clyde*. His quest for revenge is achieved at the cost of his own life but the way he meets head-on his own destruction hints at his dalliance with death from the very beginning. I would argue that, more than in any other Peckinpah's film, *Alfredo Garcia* seems to disclose Peckinpah's suicidal trajectory and the way he was a victim of his own melancholy entrapment. The last image is that of a gun barrel in close-up, aiming at the camera on which the defiant "directed by Sam Peckinpah" is presented. This ironic touch comments on the pivotal role violence has always had in Peckinpah's films, drawing the spectator into his violent world of retribution and making him/her complicit in the repulsion/attraction that his narratives elicit.

What we get in the end of this deeply pessimistic film is Bennie's profound loss and disempowerment. Nothing is regenerative in his violent response, all is delusional insofar as he spirals off on a bender of near drug-induced despair. As Kitses argues, this film is a bleak rebuttal of the regenerative power of violence which the Western could at least hold up to scrutiny. Kitses states, drawing upon a contrast with Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country*: "There are no majestic mountains here, no sublime, only a flat landscape and a degrading, nihilistic and a perverse journey that demonstrates how low humanity can be" (2004: 243). In the same vein, Prince writes: *"Alfredo Garcia* is a work of overwhelming negativity. It takes viewers on a trip through hell and creatively dwells in the spiritual netherworld of the film's main character" (210). The remaining feelings are ones of delusion, derangement and sordidness where everyone becomes involved in material, money-driven quests. The bounty-hunter mentality predominates. Al's severed head becomes a fetishistic goal which might constitute a way out of poverty for Bennie but its rotten state, the scent of death it exudes, projects the idea that, like in other films that revolve around the last heist before "retirement" - Kubrick's *The Killing* comes to mind - Bennie's downfall is entirely predictable. The film also relies on a rhetoric of disgust (Plantinga: 2009), eliciting strong physical revulsion which is "mobilized into the realm of morality" (206). Thus, as Plantinga explains, physical disgusts also implies sociomoral disgust:

> The experience of both physical and sociomoral disgust encourages persons to flee, avoid, ignore, suppress, and otherwise shun that which is unclean or contaminated. Yet in the realm of art, at least, the disgusting may also attract the viewer, creating a push and pull between curiosity and fascination on the one hand and aversion and repulsion on the other (212)

Interestingly, analyzing the film's defeatism, Kitses compares Bennie's plight to Terry Malloy's speech, "I could have been a contender, I could have been somebody instead of a bum" in Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954), Brando's incarnation of the eternal bewailing of the melancholic loser. Nowhere in Peckinpah's world is this "could have been" so strongly felt. In fact, things could have worked had Bennie been luckier, had circumstances allowed, but losing seems to have been his inescapable fate. *Alfredo Garcia*, in a more

poignant way than *Junior Bonner* or *Cross of Iron,* is about failure and the melanholiac's inability to see the other in his/her "radical alterity"(Ruti: 655) since the other only exists as a fantasy, a phantasmatic projection of the subject's fixations. As Ruti also argues: "The melancholy subject may "love" its objects with infinite faithfulness, yet it is utterly incapable of loving them without drawing them into its own psychic economy" (655). This somehow bespeaks Peckinpah's unresolved grief and the way he was incapable of coping with the experience of loss without fetishizing it and being himself infatuated with explosive death.

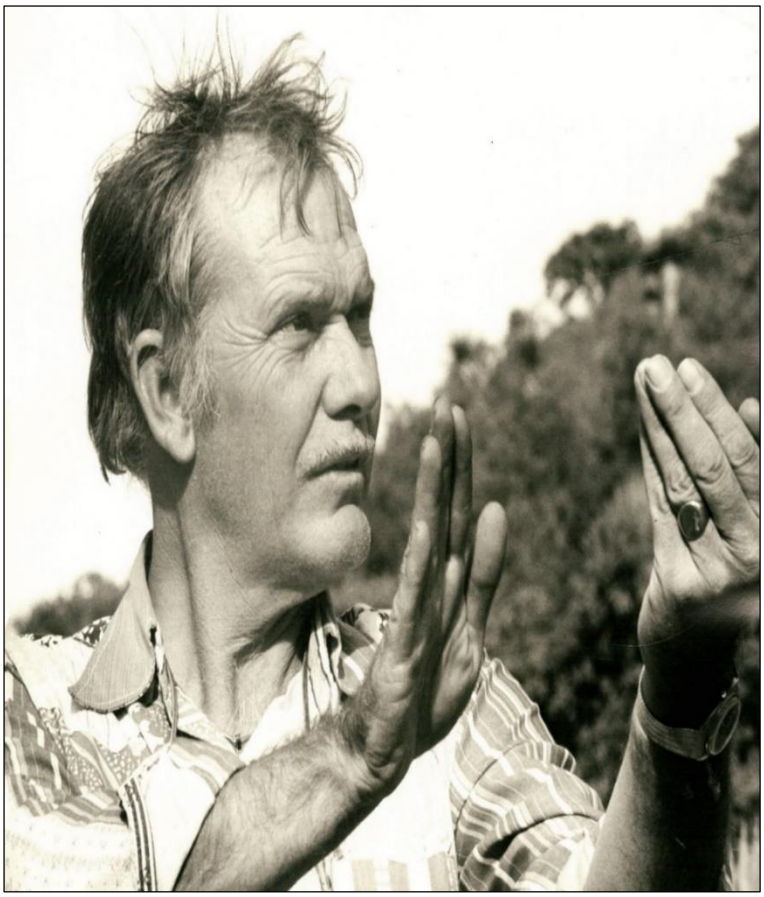
Once more Kristeva's words reverberate with meaning in the bleak melancholia of *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*:

> I can thus discover antecedents to my current breakdown in a loss, death or grief over someone or something that I once loved. The disappearance of that essential being continues to deprive me of what is most worthwhile in me; I live it as a wound of deprivation, discovering just the same that my grief is but the deferment of the hatred or ascendency that I nurture with respect to the one who betrayed or abandoned me. My depression points to my not knowing how to lose - I have perhaps been unable to find a valid compensation for that loss? It follows that any loss entails the loss of my being - and of Being itself. The depressed person is a radical, sullen atheist (1989: 5).

And it is this dissolution of the self that the film painfully evokes in the dramatization of its protagonist's loss. Nobody is supposed to lose all the time, and yet Bennie does.

Part IV

Misogyny in the Films of Sam Peckinpah



29. “I ignore women’s lib. I’m for most of what they are for, socially as well as politically and economically, but I can’t see why they have to make such assholes of themselves over the issue”, Sam Peckinpah in an interview with William Murray, 1972 (Hayes: 106).

VII- Misogyny: of men's insecurity and women's power

> "You think a girl goes for you and you find out she's after your money or your balls or your money and your balls. Women today are better hung than the men."
> Jonathan (Jack Nicholson) in Mike Nichols's *Carnal Knowledge (*1971)

Misogyny is a term which evokes discomfort and a certain confusion. Despite the emancipation movements that have had a political and social impact on women's rights, misogyny still insinuates itself in covert ways in contemporary societies since it bespeaks an attitude of dislike, distrust and anxiety in relation to women. Throughout history, women have been held in awe, fear or contempt, objectified through the male gaze, whereas men have arrogated to themselves authority and agency and have taken up the role of subjects rather than objects. Drawing on the Kantian notion of the sublime, Bonnie Mann has shown how the Western aesthetic tradition is profoundly masculinist insofar as women have been relegated to this aesthetic objectified whereas men belong to contemplation and thought. She also explores how the sublime, as a source of exhilaration and terror, has evolved from being associated with men's scope and their reasoning capabilities - Kant's legacy - into a disruptive experience that threatens fantasies of a unitary, independent and self-sufficient identity. In this process, the sublime has been recuperated by feminist thought since it challenges the "autonomous and sovereign masculine subject" (2006: 44). Mann writes apropos of the masculinist vision of women articulated by the Western tradition of art and philosophy:

> The difference is that women's subjectivity is permanently occupied with appearance, is devoted to appearance, and thus, is permanently compromised by her status as an object. Her subjectivity is *in service* to her primary role as an appearing object (2006: 41).

John Berger, analyzing how art has articulated "ways of seeing" that denote a gendered-grounded form of representation, also writes:

> To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity of living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch

> herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself (…) One might simplify this way by saying: men *act* and women *appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight (1990: 46-47).

Misogyny is enmeshed with women's lived experiences and it brings to the fore questions of gender equality and women's access to what Timothy Macklem defines as "what it means to lead a successful life" (2003: 23) in a social world which quite often reduces for the female sex the possibility of pursuing "valuable projects and activities that are endorsed as one's personal goals" (23). According to Macklem, misconceptions involving questions of sexual identity are the reason for discrimination insofar as this implies the privileging of a set of qualities ascribed to masculinity in relation to femininity. In this sense, the role of feminism is to lay bare these misconceptions and denounce the ways in which they work to prevent women from leading successful lives. As he argues:

> Feminism derives its moral dimension from the particular forms of limitation and disadvantage that may follow from the widespread promulgation of false or irrelevant conception of what it means to be a woman. Such a conception, if comprehensively endorsed, renders it impossible or virtually impossible for those defined by it to gain access to the goods to which all human beings are entitled, whether those goods are understood as opportunities, as resources, as an adequate range of valuable options, as the satisfaction of needs, or as anything else *that is sensitive to the condition of those to whom it is addressed* (115).

Back in the 1990s, Lynne Segal argued how masculinity is subjected to social pressures that are based on processes of exclusion, that is, regulatory practices which also imply discursive regimes on definitions of manhood. She states:

> The force and power of the dominant ideals of masculinity, I argue, do not derive from any intrinsic characteristic of individuals but from the social meanings which accrue to these ideals from their supposed superiority to that which they are not. To be "masculine" is *not* to be "feminine", *not* to be "gay", *not* to be tainted with any marks of "inferiority"- ethnic or otherwise (1990: xxxiv).

Thus, we can argue that in these regulatory practices, through which manhood can be associated with power, excluding the "bodies that do not matter" (to recall Butler's words in part one, section two), there have been through emancipatory historical moments several threats to a socially inculcated notion of male dominance. Power has been exerted over women throughout recorded and no doubt unrecorded time since men have felt they need to assert their social and sexual control to reinforce a sense of hegemony. And yet, this control is always fragile, drawing its strength from an array of mechanisms that are imperiled by shifting contexts and suggests an often hysterical response to a sense of perceived diminishment in different domains from the public to the private spheres. If we recall *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Jack Arnold, 1957), we can read the film as an allegory of men's sense of loss after World War II inasmuch as women started to acquire a more prominent professional role. Misogyny can thus be read as a mechanism of defense, denoting a psychic fear regarding women's inroads into realms hitherto associated with men. Segal observes:

> As it is represented in our culture, "masculinity" is a quality of being which is always incomplete, and which is based as much on a social as on a psychic reality. It exists in the various forms of power men ideally possess: the power to assert control over women, over other men, over their own bodies, over machines and technology (123).

Elaine J. Lawless argues that a misogynistic view of women, the positioning of women as defiling, and abject, is embedded in Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious traditions where women are seen as the weaker vessel, driving men to corruption. She then sets out to explore how these "beliefs serve to reinforce the attitude that the abuse against women is expected, if not acceptable, male behavior" (2003: 240). She adds:

> Folklore motifs recorded from around the world attest to the nearly universal portrayal of women as the equivalent of evil, not just possessing evil powers. It is telling that the entry for "woman" in the *Dictionary of Mythology and Folklore* (Leach 1945-50) begins "Woman-as evil". The entry outlines Eve's deceitful nature, the lure of sirens, adulterous women, and the untrustworthiness of a plethora of women in mythology and Judeo/Christian religious historiography, iconography and theology (242).

In her studies of misogyny, which included ethnographic work with women who have been "beaten, raped and (sometimes) killed by their husbands and partners" (239), Lawless has come to understand through several interviews and life testimonies how young women may internalize a negative view of themselves which will later impact upon their self-esteem, and conspire with their own victimized positions:

> (…) the belief that females are dirty, sexualized, abject beings is transmitted to small girls at a very early age and is endorsed through religious, cultural and social discourses throughout their lives. The message girls receive and internalize is articulated either through language ("you are a whore") or through defilement: girls are raped, molested, abused, *and then silenced and /or ignored* at a very early stage because they are seen as sinful objects of desire (239-240).

Julia Kristeva's ground-breaking work on the power of horror and the way it is deeply rooted in bodily abjection delves into the way women's bodies have been associated with the abject since the maternal, "parturition and the blood that goes with it" (1982: 99) points to the corporeal, to the biological cycle of menstruation and thus place women within the realm of abjection whereby the "clean and proper" (100) body is threatened with defilement. The need to establish a boundary between the feminine and the masculine is a cultural imposition which guarantees the entrance in the symbolic by severing the "unclean" bonds with the mother's body. She therefore writes: "Symbolic identity presupposes the violent difference of the sexes" (100).

Significantly, analyzing the connections between masculinity and violence Segal also notices how "socially approved uses of force and violence" (267) have somehow reinforced the connections of violence with men. She states:

> It is apparent that some men's far more formal training in the use of violence is something which can, and from the evidence of women who are battered, frequently does, spill over into these men's greater resort to violence in their personal relations with women. It also provides opportunities for men to be particularly vicious to women (and men) in the performance of their public duties (268).

Segal also emphasizes that generalizations are always dangerous and "violence, it seems clear, cannot be simply equated with masculinity" (269). And yet, despite this caveat, she concludes:

> There are links between the prevalence of violence in our society and men's endeavours to affirm "masculinity". And these links may even be reinforced, as the assumption of men's dominance over women - part of the traditional definition of "masculinity" - continues to crumble. Some men, *increasingly less sure of such dominance,* may resort to violence in their attempt to shore up a sense of masculine identity. Others, however, may not (269). (my italics)

Jack Holland, tracing the historical background of the term "misogyny", observes how it can be found in ancient Greece and through the legacy of Greek thinkers, it has seeped into the patriarchal order around which nearly every society has been structured. He observes:

> Misogyny, the hatred of women, has thrived on many different levels, from the loftiest philosophical plane in the works of Greek thinkers, who helped frame how western society views the world, to the back streets of nineteenth century London and the highways of modern Los Angeles, where serial killers have left in their wake a trail of the tortured and mutilated corpses of women (2006: 4).

Holland continues his reasoning by underlining how misogyny is so difficult to define because it implies a complex psychic process. He argues:

> But, on the depressing list of hatreds that human beings feel for each other, none other than misogyny involves the profound need and desires that most men have for women, and most women for men. Hatred coexists with desire in a peculiar way. This is what makes misogyny so complex: it involves a man's conflict with himself. Indeed for the most part, the conflict is not even recognized (5).

Holland's description projects the twisted feelings underlying misogyny: a mixture of desire and resentment, of repulsion and attraction which speaks to male insecurity, the fear of female sexuality and its liberation from the domestic sphere. More recently it has entailed an anxiety about men's sexual performance in a post liberationist social environment where intimacy is no longer circumscribed by marriage and domesticity. Susan Faludi argues that there is a sense of betrayal in this process inasmuch as American men, who had

grown up with a feeling that they were entitled to authority, were unwittingly confronted with the belittling of that power by women's progressive inroads into the workplace and, consequently, the framing of heterosexual relations in a context in which men had unproblematically taken on the breadwinner-role was progressively superseded. If this was a burgeoning process in post-World War II, it became acutely felt after the Vietnam experience. She observes:

> Then the boy came home - whether from Saigon or Kent State - to the domestic continuation of a guerrilla war. Now the contested village was his own, the village he thought he was defending. He was greeted on his return by women not blowing kisses but indifferent or even hostile to his efforts. These women did not leave their jobs, upon his arrival; many of them didn't accept or accepted only resentfully a renewed dependency upon him, because about the time the men were off trying to prove their manhood, by liberating an "oppressed" people or clashing with the National Guard, their wives and girlfriends had decided to liberate themselves. The loved one whom the man imagined himself supporting and protecting was often doing just fine on her own, and she didn't much appreciate his efforts to assert his authority. In fact, sometimes his wife now saw *him* as the oppressor (1999: 29).

These threats to a sense of male domination gave rise to what Faludi describes in another of her studies as "the backlash" (1992); this response served as an undeclared war on feminism, whereby different statistics and studies concocted facts to prove that women had become neurotic and miserable with their "barren wombs" and, despite their professional success, they had been faced with loneliness and desolation, as borne out by the rising levels of depression amongst them. This colludes with the idea that women have not gained much from their emancipation. Faludi observes:

> As the backlash consensus solidified, statistics on women stopped functioning as social barometers. The data instead became society's checkpoints, positioned at key intervals in the life course of women, dispatching warnings on the perils of straying from the appointed path. The prescriptive agenda, certainly in the US, governed the life span of virtually every statistic on women in the 1980s, from initial gathering to final dissemination. In the Reagan administration, US Census Bureau demographers found themselves under increasing pressure to generate data for the government's war against women's independence, to produce statistics "proving" the rising threat of infertility, the physical and psychic risks lurking in abortion, the dark side of single parenthood" (1992: 26).

Surprisingly, the position that women have more to lose than to gain by the shifting patterns of heterosexual relations in which men have forfeited the breadwinner-role is also underlined by a more right-wing position such as the one embraced by Melanie Phillips. According to Phillips, feminists' obsession with liberation and independence has left women adrift without the support of their male counterparts since traditional family relations were called into question by women's emancipation and men were demonized as the representatives of an oppressive patriarchal structure. In this sense, she argues that, by liberating women from men's economic support, feminist belligerence has placed them in a predicament where the state has had to stand in for male dominance and consequently women have become more impoverished and unable to fight for themselves. Phillips observes:

> The family wage wasn't seriously questioned until the family started to break down in the 1970s, leaving women struggling alone with their children. Since women were said to be the victims of patriarchy, feminists couldn't admit the obvious truth that the poverty of lone mothers and their children was the result of the breakdown of the family and the loss of the male breadwinner. Someone else, therefore, had to shoulder the responsibility for this poverty. So lone mothers had to become the responsibility of the state. (1999: 219).

Interestingly, this view would fit what Faludi defines as the "war" against feminism and it becomes more baffling as it is endorsed by a woman who claims men have been scapegoated by feminist radicalism. In this sense, Phillips regards many of the struggles of feminism as radical pursuits which have had a disastrous impact upon traditional patterns of family relations and a pernicious effect through the "feminization" of boys whose identities are muddled by a process of derision of male characteristics. As she asks: "Where is the value of their own distinctiveness as men when only female characteristics are said to be virtuous?" (187). Phillips holds a conservative view which downplays the effect of domestic violence against women and advocates a regression to a state of affairs where women's dependence upon men reinforces and protects family bonds. She seems to miss the fact that dependence is a necessary basis for social and sexual inequality as women are deprived of the possibility of thriving in the workplace and of developing themselves as capable and free-thinking human beings. This brings to mind Macklem's views and his

underlining of how questions of gender equality should be seen in the actual context of women and men's lives where variety and difference must also be taken into account. As he argues "The wrong done to women in denying them successful lives is free-standing not derivative; it is absolute not relative. Women should be able to lead successful lives, not because men do, but because every person should" (18). He also emphasizes how the pursuit of equality has drawn on questions of sameness and difference of women in relation to men, placing the latter as the "standard of reference" (48), the embodiment of qualities against which women are measured. He thus goes on to present Catherine MacKinnon's work as exemplary in the way it delves into women's predicament in a social organisation where they are subordinated to men's dominance and rule. Macklem observes about MacKinnon's exploration of the subject:

> For MacKinnon, the inequality of men and women, properly understood as the dominance of men over women, is the source of the difference between the sexes rather than one of the possible consequences of that difference. Discrimination against women is not a matter of treating women arbitrarily or irrationally, but of treating them as less. It is to be looked for not merely in individual decisions that disfavor women but in the fabric of society as a whole and the manner in which it constructs the concepts of maleness and femaleness, for it is through the definition of sex that the subordination of women is primarily established and enforced. The pursuit of equality is thus a matter of probing the social construction of sex, and demanding an end to hierarchy there (50).

By exploring situations in which women give testimonies of their victimization through "sexual harassment, battery, rape, prostitution and child abuse and the representation of all this in pornography" (55), MacKinnon's view accords with Dworkin's in that both regard sex as an expression of domination in which women unwittingly comply with their subordinated roles.

Macklem expounds on this view:

> As inequality of power constructs sex so it constructs sexuality. Sexuality, MacKinnon argues, is simply the eroticization of the patterns of dominance and submission found in sex, so that questions of desire can never be isolated from questions of power. It follows that the erotic is inextricably connected with the violent, that the violation of women by men that is dramatized in pornography and enforced through rape

> constitutes sexuality as most men and women understand it. All sexual relations are in this sense sado-masochistic (52).

Significantly Dworkin had vehemently argued in *Intercourse*:

> Sexual intercourse is not intrinsically banal, though pop-magazines like *Esquire* and *Cosmopolitan* would suggest that it is. It is intense, often desperate. The internal landscape is violent upheaval, a wild and ultimately cruel disregard for human individuality, a brazen, high-strung wanting that is absolute and imperishable, not attached to personality, no respecter of boundaries; ending not in sexual climax but in a human tragedy of failed relationships, vengeful bitterness in an aftermath of sexual heat, personality corroded by too much endurance of undesired, habitual intercourse, conflict, a wearing away of vitality in the numbness finally of habit or compulsion or the loneliness of separation. The experience of fucking changes people so that they are often lost to each other and slowly they are lost to human hope. The pain of having been exposed, so naked, leads to hiding, self-protection, building barricades, emotional and physical alienation or violent retaliation against anyone who gets too close (1987: 25).

These views suggest a bleak, rather pessimistic, understanding of heterosexual relations since what they underline is how intercourse is not the road to fulfilment but to personal loss. The violent retaliation against anyone who "gets too close" lies at the heart of the twisted and insidious nature of misogyny and suggests, dispiritingly, how intimacy becomes imbricated with power and the way it is held to reinforce male dominance. Macklem notes with some concern:

> What MacKinnon finds objectionable in the present structure of sexual relations, therefore, is not that men hold power rather than women, or that men hold power exclusively rather than jointly with women, but that power, in the sense of dominance, is held at all (54).

Significantly, Angela McRobbie observes how feminism, in its most combative and committed-to-change form, seems to have declined and has progressively given place to a feeling of reassurance whereby the gains of liberation no longer need to be aggressively asserted since they can be taken for granted. This undoing of feminism by which "feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentless undermined" (2009: 11) colludes with an "array of machinations" (11) that in the post-feminist era attempt - under the guise

of freedom and liberation - to place women in compliant positions where they are manipulated into relinquishing a more assertive and contentious role. McRobbie argues: "Feminism is taken into account only to be shown that it is no longer necessary" (17). The endless possibilities of choice offered by a consumer culture have emphasized an individualistic femininity which self-manages and monitors itself, constantly interpellated by the fashion, and beauty culture which shapes and nurtures a female image that can safely ward off the ghost of the "castrating figures of the lesbian and the feminist" (66). McRobbie expands on this idea:

> The Symbolic has had to find a new way of exerting its authority and does so by delegation. (…) The Symbolic discharges (or maybe franchises) its duties to the commercial domain (beauty, fashion, magazines, body culture, etc) which becomes the source of authority and judgement for young women. The heightening of significance in regard to the required rituals of femininity as well as an intensification of prescribed heterosexually-directed pleasures and enjoyment are among the key hallmarks of this decentred Symbolic. In the language of health and well-being, the global fashion beauty complex charges itself with the business of assuring that appropriate gender relations are guaranteed. The field of instruction and pleasure oversees the processes of female individualization which requires *the repudiation of feminism typecast as embodying bodily failure, hideousness and monstrosity* (61-62). (my italics)

These strategies collude with an undermining and "undoing" of feminism as they secure patriarchal authority by deluding women into thinking that their economic and educational gains have located them in more privileged positions where feminism becomes a "ghost" from the past, a cumbersome memory of battles fought and won, no longer needed to be reasserted. Thus, many women indulge in a post-feminist masquerade whereby they don the accoutrements of femininity to re-position themselves in a new social (and sexual) contract where they have made considerable inroads into the world of work but still need to mask "rivalry with men" (67) and deflect any threats posed by their hitherto unfelt empowerment. These view accords with Kristin J. Anderson's study on post-feminism and its emphasis on consumer choice as evidence of empowerment. Anderson argues, in the same vein as McRobbie, that contemporary feminism has relied on a rhetoric of empowerment and individual choice, emptying out the elements of critique and dissent of second wave feminist struggles, which are deemed unnecessary and even radical in

essence. In a social environment marked by excessive individualism, narcissistic quests and the hypersexualisation and commodification of women's bodies, the call for a collective consciousness and structural changes in the distribution of power is regarded with suspicion, since feminism and its gains have already been secured. Anderson observes:

> A main feature of post-feminism is the acknowledgment that choices young women have today are due in large part to the women's liberation movement before them. However, the legacy of feminism is not recognized by some of the very women who benefit from it today and who believe they have choices. That they do not recognize the role of feminism in their freedoms is an indication of the extent to which feminism in the early 21st century is not a marginalized discourse but has become an integral part of young women's lives. In order to demonstrate the empowerment and success expected of them, women in this post-feminist individualist culture seemingly need to dissociate themselves from feminism: precisely *because* young women feel empowered, they believe they no longer need feminism (2015: 10).

As Sally Robinson argues, white heterosexual masculinity has recently positioned itself as wounded and victimized by the emergence of minorities, which have rendered its hitherto unmarked status - as a token of its universalizing power - marked and visible. Drawing upon the exploration of several literary and cinematic narratives, from John Updike's novels to Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* (1989), Robinson constructs her argument by claiming that white heterosexual masculinity has reinstated its power through a "rhetoric of crisis" (1999: 57) whereby the image of an ailing manhood muses over its wounds and steers away from the decentered position to which it has been consigned by new discursive practices where marginal voices have gained prominence. Robinson observes:

> The real crime of feminism and multiculturalism is not that they make truth relative, but that they make *white masculinity* relative, by placing white men within the field of identity politics, by marking them as the embodiment of a particularity that "just happens" to coincide with the normative, and putatively, unmarked self. The culture warriors position themselves as beleaguered but heroic rebels, replacing other heroes in the annals of American liberation. It is much more compelling to represent this authority as beleaguered than as empowered, especially in a culture so enamored of the idea of the underdog. While there is ample evidence to suggest that white and male power reproduces itself through cycles of crisis and resolution, the rhetoric of crisis fueling the discourses of the culture wars produces other effects, as well. Announcing crisis is risky, in that it acknowledges the vulnerability of white masculinity; at the same time, that vulnerability can produce new kinds of power, the power of the wounded, the disenfranchised, the maligned (86).

Robinson's theorization points to the way white heterosexual masculinity has perceived itself as victimized by feminist discourses which have demonized its power and thus the way to renegotiate its unimpeachable universalizing status is to position itself as wounded and traumatized. This trauma is translated into bodily manifestations and with the obsessive vision of body penetration by multiple dangers taking the form of "metaphorical rapes" (67). Robinson claims that in many of the narratives she analyses heterosexual males place themselves as victims of a "rape culture" which "marks all men as potential rapists, natural victimizers" (67). This discloses how misogyny operates in veiled ways, relying on a discourse of male victimization to stealthily re-inscribe its location in an empowered position that is predicated on a covert indictment of feminist discourses. Robinson observes:

> As I have been arguing, the post-sixties era witnesses a new, white and male investment in the "victim function", a desire on the part of those whose social and political dominance has positioned them as victimizers, not victims, to cash in on the symbolic value of victimization and to experience the pleasures and pains to be found in a new and male embodiment (125).

The will to dominate is thus reasserted and restored through a renewed negotiation with power and agency whereby men position themselves as bearers of authority, albeit one constantly challenged and questioned. Michael Kaufman points out about the maturation process which any young boy undergoes to attain manhood:

> He embraces the project of controlling himself and controlling the world. He comes to personify activity. Masculinity is a reaction against passivity and powerlessness and, with it, comes a repression of all the desires and traits that a given society defines as negatively passive or as resonant of passive experiences (1987: 13).

Kaufman also elaborates upon the idea of surplus repression as an organizing and oppressive force which presides over any "hierarchical and authoritarian societies" (9), with the purpose of maintaining prescriptive or normative models including those of gender. Relying on Marcuse's explanation of basic and surplus repression, Kaufman proposes that basic repression entails the "damming up or deflection of human desires" which "is necessary for any conceivable human association" (9). Surplus repression will

"narrow down sexuality into genital contact, with a heterosexual norm" (8) and in this paring down of pleasure to a norm, masculinity is supposed to epitomize an activity-driven, agency-directed pattern. But, as Kaufman also observes, this repression can exert a great deal of pressure inasmuch as it entails the effacing of any emotional dependence, the recognition and acceptance of pain and fear. As he argues: "The emotional pain created by obsessive masculinity is stifled by reinforcing masculinity itself" (12). As the process of surplus repression implies the smothering of any signs of passivity and the vindication of power and domination, masculinity is always already "terrifyingly fragile"(13) since this monolithic patina harbors insecurity and anxiety over patterns of performance according to the prescriptions of a socially and historically embedded conception of manhood. The doubts and misgivings regarding the accoutrements of masculinity will be thus expressed by what he references as a triad of violence: violence against oneself, when one feels entangled by feelings of inadequacy, guilt and self-loathing which have been blocked by the pressure to correspond to a model of stalwart masculinity; violence against other men which plays out the competitive, surplus aggression-induced reinforcement of a retributive type of masculinity; and finally violence against women, which can take many forms from physical or verbal abuse to misogynistic marginalization. As Kaufman states:

> Men's violence against women is probably the clearest, most straightforward expression of relative male and female power. That the relative social, economic, and political power can be expressed in this manner is, to a large part, because of differences in physical strength and in a lifelong training (or lack of training) in fighting. But it is also expressed this way because of the active/passive split. *Activity as aggression is part of the masculine gender definition*. That is not to say this definition always includes rape or battering, but it is one of the possibilities within a definition of activity that is ultimately grounded in the body (15). (my italics)

The split between activity and passivity with its attendant masculinity/femininity dichotomy, may be one of the most blatant ways in which gender constructions can have a perverse effect on heterosexual relations, since it imposes pressures on the male psyche, forcing it to be the embodiment of agency and action. In an interesting analysis of battering men and their accounts of their own acts, Jamie L. Mullaney concluded that many aggressors, rather than relying on excuses for their wrongdoing, invoke rationales which

allow them to hide under "the umbrella of patriarchy" (2007: 244) and to root their violence in a socially constructed work in which men are entitled to display it in their acting out of a protective role. As Mullaney observes: "The theme of protection carries through to men's repudiation and minimization of violence" (240). She also explains:

> Justifications, in fact, directly oppose excuses in their admission of wrongdoing and responsibility, completely obliterating the possibility for role distance. In this sense, then, the use of justifications appears to be one of the worst identity moves a batterer could make. Justifications, however, allow batterers to save face as men. Men who justify their violence are able to present it only as a positive (or at least not entirely negative) force because it is a means of restoring the rights and privileges to which they feel entitled. Feeling totally emasculated by their partners, the criminal justice system, and the agencies to which they have been assigned, men attempt to reclaim specific facets of hegemonic masculinity by focusing on the unjust ways others denied it to them. Much of their talk hones in on their partners' failure to respect the duties they perform for them as men. Specifically, men feel justified in their violence because they are doing the things they are called to do as men only to find that their partners respond with nothing but ingratitude (239).

In his analysis of the way American manhood feeds on a warrior myth which represses all traits that suggest femininity and passivity, T. Walter Herbert emphasizes the idea that socially constructed masculinity is in its essence repressive:

> Contemporary young American men inherit a tradition that has taken the warrior code from warrior life and made it a "natural" imperative, a genetically programmed character that men must fulfil if they are to attain true manhood. At first glance this seems absurd: no human being acts in a way forbidden by his or her genetic constitution. But this version of masculinity succeeds nonetheless in proposing the inevitable as obligatory. The fusion of "natural manhood" with warrior manhood took place in our early national period, and while the tradition has passed through significant changes in the intervening two centuries, it is very much alive today (2002: 60-61).

The pressures to attain this model fosters a split selfhood and subjectivity, based upon the effacing of emotion and feelings - since these are construed as signs of weakness - that perpetuates the idea that men are self-sufficient and independent. The repression takes the form of demeaning expressions: "bitch", "pussy", "cunt", which equated with femininity become infamous forms of verbal aggression governing rituals whereby young

men are supposed to suppress the vulnerability inside themselves. In Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) Sergeant Hartman's sexist speeches are copiously punctuated by references to "pussy" as a way to debase and humiliate trainees by ascribing to them alleged and unwanted female traits within the military world. In a related vein, Clint Eastwood's *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986) also relies on the warrior myth aligning tough masculinity with bravado at the same time as it attempts to secure female sympathy by foregrounding the protagonist's attempts to assimilate a type of discourse, supposedly construed as "female". In order to reconcile with his estranged ex-wife, Eastwood's character debunks feminist discourse by paring it down to a clichéd psycho-babble of new gender relations. This strategy foregrounds what Robinson describes as narratives of blockage and release[49] that posit men as victims of patriarchy and its implied demands that manhood be molded on a thrift of emotion. This alludes to the all-male, leftist consciousness-raising groups that emerged in tandem with feminism, attempting to explore the way men's blockage sprang from patriarchal impositions. In this sense, the need to release feelings and emotions is construed as a flow of men's untapped, stifled selves. And yet, as Robinson suggests, this flow is also predicated on a sexualized discourse which purports to re-masculinize the release of feeling and construe it as a valid assertion of manhood. She observes:

> Because American masculinity has always been about the freedom to move forward (into the frontier or up the career ladder), blockage is by definition a threat. For those who have been nurtured on inalienable rights and "natural" entitlements blockage must appear particularly threatening. But, further, in focusing on the blockage of anger, for instance, the male liberationists "masculinize" emotion, making release look violent, like "hurricanes", gathering force and "volcanoes" threatening to erupt (137).

She adds:

> An undeniable phallic emphasis on "release" diffuses anxieties about feminization, as emotions get reconceptualized as virile, and male expressivity as the right of all men. This argument, drawing on a liberationist discourse of rights and entitlements, works by a sleight-of-hand: springing from a feminist discourse that had reason to criticize male emotional inexpressivity as a behaviour that perpetuates male power, men's

[49] She analyses at some depth *The Liberated Man*: *Beyond Masculinity- Freeing Men and their Relationship with Women* by Warren Farrell (1974) and Herb Goldberg's *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege* (1976).

> liberation discourse now claims that men have been deprived of their right to express themselves (137).

In a similar vein, Jane Gallop had already called attention to a new strand of thought characterizing post-modernism: "Post-modernist thinkers are defending against the downfall of patriarchy by trying not to be male. In drag, they are aping the feminine rather than thinking their place as men in an obsolescent patriarchy" (1988: 100). She also adds: "Being anti-phallic becomes the new phallus, which women come up lacking once more" (100). As Tania Modleski argued apropos of films which focus on war and masculinity, like the ones by Kubrick, Eastwood and *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986), there is an underlying effort to rescue patriarchal authority even when narratives appear to pay lip service to women's issues and to feminist-related concerns. Accordingly, she argues that war films show "the activities of breaking hearts and taking lives - that is, sexual domination and wartime aggression - to be so intertwined as to make it nearly impossible to speak, in an older way of conceptualizing the problem, of a "displaced sexuality" (1991: 62). She goes on:

> In fantasies of war, sexuality is manifested in violence, and violence carries an explosive sexual charge. To take a particularly vivid example from a sequence in *Top Gun*; as each of the two male characters goes off to have sex with the woman he is involved with, the song "Great Balls of Fire" plays on the soundtrack; then the music merges into that of the theme song, while the men go back to practicing their war games and are forced to parachute out of the plane, which explodes as the hero's partner dies (62).

The idea that in war scenarios, violence is displaced into sexuality as a form of aggression has already been disclosed in Peckinpah's *Cross of Iron*. The "great balls of fire" that the Jerry Lee Lewis's song evokes reinforce the need to align masculinity with sexual potency but simultaneously hints at its attendant destructive effect, dramatized by the many situations whereby sexually-laden discourse or sexual intercourse takes the form of violent assault. Susan Faludi explains at length how military schools rely on rituals which are meant to erode any emasculating signs (1999) inasmuch as emotional displays are aligned with weakness.

Not surprisingly in Faludi's *Terror Dream*, she expands on the way feminism reached its lowest ebb in post 9/11. The idea that American society had been weakened in the wake of post-liberalist movements was invoked as the reason for American males' enfeeblement and the diminishment of their virility, leading to their unpreparedness. Their emasculation required an angst-ridden rhetoric which fed upon frontier, pioneer myths and the need to bring back John Wayne in his darkest possible embodiment: Ethan from Ford's *The Searchers*. Faludi observes: "This was the Duke we were so desperate "to welcome back" in the aftermath of 9/11, a stone-cold killer and Indian hater who would stand guard over our virginal girls (2007: 7). Ethan's deep-seated resentment against a virginal girl who had been sullied by sexual contact with a savage warrior perversely projects a misogynist stance and an anxiety over the inheritance of feminism and its liberationist discursive practices. The recurrent reliance on captivity tales that Faludi describes as one of the main media ploys in the wake of the attacks bespeaks the need to re-inscribe manhood in the backdrop of frontier-style retributive violence whereby women are still seen in need of male protection, buttressing the privileges of a patriarchal authority rendered fragile by its own deference to, and accommodation of, oppressed voices. If misogyny translates men's resentment against women, American cinema, with its obsessive treatment of masculinity, reflects an anxious response to feminist discourses, suggesting the need to re-center a bruised manhood and "lick" its wounds. In the next section, we will see some examples which show how masculinity has attempted to renegotiate its endangered power by articulating a rhetoric of victimization and disempowerment.

i- Misogyny in American Cinema: of wimps and wild men

"Respect the cock …and tame the cunt"
Frank T.J. Mackey's (Tom Cruise) in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999)

American cinema has always been a cinema of men where women have played a rather peripheral role. Molly Haskell's appraisal (1987) of the treatment of women in film points to the conclusion that rarely has American cinema been concerned with women and their internal lives or experiences in the social world. The dismantling of the studio system and the loosening of regulation on what could be shown on screen have further placed women at the mercy of exploitative profit-driven strategies which have cashed in on more open sexual exposure. She offers a comprehensive view of the way women have been given relevance (or irrelevance) in the history of American cinema and concludes, quite resentfully, that despite being bound by the studio system, women were given more prominent roles throughout the thirties and forties. Actresses like Katherine Hepburn, Rosalind Russell, Barbara Stanwick, Joan Crawford or Betty Davis, among others, were associated with an idea of strength that could match their male co-stars - even if at the end they would have to be assimilated into the social system. The fifties drifted toward a regulated misogyny with the *femmes fatales* of film noir threatening male authority, those castrating figures that made men lose control of themselves.

Haskell has argued that the situation became even worse in the sixties and seventies where women served mainly as a consolation for a masculinity which wallowed in its own wounds and mused over its losses. Tellingly, she also notices how things have tended to be even worse:

> The treatment of women in the movies over the last ten years is the story of an absence, followed by a fragmented, schizophrenic, but oddly hopeful presence. After a period (the mid-to-late seventies) during which grown up women were as rare as fireflies in January, they began to return to cinema, but not with a collective voice or cohesive pattern and certainly not in roles that could be held up as blueprints for budding feminists (372).

Significantly, the movie brats of the new Hollywood cinema were mainly concerned with the travails of male relationships and women were relegated to ancillary positions in a world which, like Peckinpah's, was profoundly male-dominated. As Haskell claims:

> And the Young Turks who might have been expected to ally themselves with women - Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma, Francis Coppola, Paul Schrader, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg - burrowed into violent male-centered melodramas or retreated into a no less fantastic world of eternal adolescence (377).

Joan Smith in *Misogynies* (1989) - the plural is suggestive of the many ways misogyny infiltrates public and private spheres - analyses some of Brian De Palma's films, such as *Dressed to Kill* (1980) or *Blow Out* (1981), concluding that "Female fear sells films. It's a box office hit" (16). Women's punishment in films De Palma's or even in the gory scenarios co-opted by slasher movies suggest a misogynistic view of female sexuality which is often portrayed as untrustworthy, rapacious or even murderous. Female characters in epoch-defining films such as those in *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987) or *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992) represent economically independent women, with successful careers, as either neurotic (as in the former) or homicidal (as in the latter), revealing how throughout the 80s and 90s American cinema was in large part committed to rescuing men from the legacy of feminism. Smith observes with some humour:

> If a man appears to take the initiative in violent acts, he is simply taking a pre-emptive strike. Men beware women: the frills and furbelows of femininity hide the knife (28).

These views recall Sally Robinson's vision of white masculinity in crisis, as the previous section has argued. Only by "dwelling in crisis" (27) can the "threats to the normativity of white masculinity get managed" (27). When back in the late seventies Joan Mellen expanded on "the big, bad wolves of American cinema" (1978), she missed the fact that quite often these representations of infallibility and strength betrayed insecurity and anxiety. In this sense, MacKinnon's views on inequality as a hierarchical distribution of power where women are always subordinated to "the systematic dominance of male supremacy" (in Macklem: 53) can be disclosed in the imbalance that characterizes onscreen representations of masculinity and femininity.

Falling Down (Joel Schumacher, 1993) illustrates the idea of crisis - which has so often pervaded discussions on masculinity - by foregrounding a middle-class masculinity beleaguered by a sense of loss and deprivation which asserts its power through violent action. Michael Douglas's D-Fens, - a pun on defense - feels adrift in a social world which has betrayed him by undermining his male authority: deprived of his role as breadwinner, made "economically unviable", "over-educated and underskilled", he has become obsolete in a reshaped social and economic structure where he is no longer needed. Estranged from his wife who forbids him from seeing his daughter through a restraining order, Douglas's character "falls down", releasing a pent up energy that is undeniably phallic, a dramatization of what Robinson would call the language of "blockage and release" (134). The film dwells on the need to free men from their "emotional constipation" (Robinson: 128) and this can only be achieved by taking violent retribution for the wrongs society has inflicted on him. Robert Duvall's character, the desk-bound detective, mirrors D-Fens's sense of loss and dispossession. Pandering to the whims of a whining wife, he has accepted to do desk work, lest she be too nerve-stricken; therefore, he is constantly mocked by his colleagues. *Falling Down* offers thus the image of a besieged masculinity, emotionally stunted by women's liberated status and afflicted by the relentless effect of late capitalism and its collateral damages. Robinson puts it this way:

> Middle American becomes visible as wounded, weakened and vulnerable, and while this might compromise the power and position of white masculinity, such a representation also enables white man to lay claim to a newly emerging center: white men too can claim civil rights and restitution against their injuries (29).

D-Fens's baffling realization before he dies ("I am the bad guy then. How did that happen? I did everything I was told to") points to his mental confusion in a new reframing of sexual, economic and social relations, making his often-articulated intention of "going home" a desperate, and poignant, attempt to retrieve his lost power. The film disguises its reactionary portrayal of manhood by victimizing it and carefully drawing the line between a man who just wants to go home to his family, reprising his role as a father, and other forms of deranged, fascist masculinities that punctuate the narrative. De Niro's Travis Bickle resonates here but whereas in Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* the character's sense of loss is

channeled into a solipsistic quest for justice, Douglas's D-Fens and his resentment seem to be coterminous with a coherent, albeit violent, response to a world infected by different social illnesses which demands masculinity reassert its prominent role after years of liberationist lenience.

Likewise, in *Magnolia* (1999) by Paul Thomas Anderson, Tom Cruise's Frank plays the role of a men's seminar leader whose speeches are intended to inspire his male audience to regain authority and control over their imperiled masculinity. In his inflammatory rhetoric, eroticized gestures and extravagant body postures, Frank insists that men have been emasculated by women, that they have lost their power and have fallen prey to female caprice. His speech is messianic. As his hands cup his groin, his "seduce and destroy" motto appears behind him, and he initiates a lecture which is based on a show of masculine excess. His speech is unashamedly misogynistic and he aims to convert his followers into becoming the dominant predatory force in heterosexual relations, declaring that women have to be "put in their places". Frank's misogyny, as the narrative later reveals when his tough façade shatters and he breaks at his father's death bed, pleading with him: "I fucking hate you, you fucking asshole. Don't go away", is the result of his own traumatic childhood. His having to take care of a cancer-stricken mother, while being deprived of a father figure, has caused him to create a carapace of masculinity predicated upon performativity. In *Magnolia* the performance of masculinity is clearly pathological.

Cruise's character is based upon the teachings of Robert Bly, whose *Iron John,* somewhat ineffectually, attempts to show the way men have chosen to project their manhood in a compliant, submissive way, paying lip service to feminism. By criticizing the "soft" male of the sixties and seventies, Bly advocated that in order to recover confidence and energy, men have to get in touch with their "hairy" iron John, stifled by years of an emasculating subservience to liberationist discourses. He states:

> The mythological systems associate hair with the instinctive and the sexual and the primitive. What I'm suggesting then, is that every modern male has, lying at the bottom of his psyche, a large, primitive being covered with hair down to his feet. Making contact with this Wild Man is the step that the Eighties male or the Nineties male has yet to make. That bucketing-out process has yet to begin in our contemporary culture (1990: 6).

Bly's association of manhood with this hairy, hidden nature ready to burst out is laughable as Cruise's character so compellingly proves. That Bly blames feminism for this softening of masculinity is clear when he states:

> During the sixties, some young men drew strength from women who in turn had received some of their strength from the women's movement. Once could say that many young men in the sixties tried to accept initiation from women. But only men can initiate men, as only women can initiate women. Women can change the embryo to a boy, but only men can change the boy to a man. Initiators say that boys need a second birth, this time a birth from men (16).

Donna Peberdy, in analyzing Tom Cruise's performance as Frank, underlines how it displays a bipolar personality which swings abruptly from the epitome of the Wild Man, or hard masculinity, to that of the Wimp, or soft masculinity. The Wild man versus the Wimp is translated, in Jonathan Rutherford's version, into the Retributive Man and the New Man - as seen previously in part two, page 105 - who represent opposite poles in the spectrum of manhood (1988). According to Rutherford, the Retributive Man "appeals to the latent male violence that is endemic in our culture" (31), exposing "a virulent machismo", whereas the New Man is "the expression of the repressed body of masculinity" (32) articulating men's attempt to come to terms with an emotional life that signals a departure from a phallicized power. This bespeaks a masculinity that is always already unsettled by internal contradictions and opposing forces. As Rutherford observes:

> Violence is a common response when masculine identities are under threat. It is an attempt to destroy what Roland Barthes has called "the scandal of the Other". It represents a retreat into physical force whose fantasy is played out in toy shops across the country. Alongside the emergence of a host of beefcakes and hulks, copying the success of figures like Stallone and Schwarzenegger, there has been a similar spectacle of contrived violence for boys. Toys and TV programs like Transformers, He Man, and Masters of the Universe, with their space age heroes, their tanks bristling with weapons, are fantasies for little boys that suggest that their emerging masculinity is about control and mastery over others (29).

Frank's violently misogynistic speeches accord with Rutherford's description of a masculinity that capitalizes on mastery and control. The film goes to great lengths to expose this wildness as a sham inasmuch as "Frank's is a performance of excess; It is staged,

theatrical, consisting of grinding hips, gyrating groins, pumping arms, wild movements, and chest beating" (Peberdy 2010: 243). Moreover, the character's flamboyant toughness is contrasted with other images of masculinity which the film explores and equally debunks for their inadequacy and ineptitude - such as Doyle (William H. Macy), ex-child star on TV quiz shows who turns out to be a flawed, frustrated adult. Thus, what the film shows is that Frank's misogyny-laden speeches, his "seduce and destroy" mantra, stem from an anxiety over being like his absent father and the way the latter also used and abused women. The construction of the character draws insistently on Bly's ideas. He emphasizes the need to unveil men's true masculinity which, as Frank states is "biological", "anthropological", and which is imperiled when young boys are left to the mercy of their mothers' emasculating influence. The same vision is underscored by *Fight Club* where the narrator, played by Edward Norton, is seduced by the unruly masculinity of Tyler (Brad Pitt), who claims men have departed from their primal natures, their primeval fighting instincts, to become emasculated wimps in a consumer-oriented society. As in *Magnolia*, *Fight Club* puts misogyny at the heart of its narrative as women are seen as "tumours", "predators posing as house pets", endangering men's authority. The creation of a fight club where men can get in touch with their true natures, venting their anger and frustration through violent combat, is inspired by Bly's defense of a return to "the hunter-gatherer era" (Peberdy: 239) where men can test their mettle. Recalling Peckinpah's fondness and readiness for fighting, his weird taste for knife throwing[50] and his frequent hunting trips with his male buddies, including his brother Denny (as described by Weddle, 1996), it can be argued that Peckinpah suffered from some variant of the condition Bly would later suggest men should engage in. In *Fight Club* the narrator's consumerist drives, his catalog-based shopping, are construed as marks of a sissified existence in which men have lost their virility, having fallen prey to the domination of advertising gimmicks and to the cynical world of corporate business. Tyler's patriarchal and essentialist diatribes, and the final revelation that he is a fantasy projection, stemming from the narrator's desire to break free of the shackles of his

[50] Weddle writes: "He took up knife throwing, hurling the steel blades into the doors and walls of his office and home. Jerry Fielding's kitchen cabinets were gashed and splintered by Sam's constant target practice when he visited their house in the Hollywood Hills. If a journalist or studio executive stepped into his office, the response was Pavlovian; Sam reached for the knives and fired away (380).

stultifying life, bespeak the urge to reinstate patriarchal order and efface the endangering prominence of women in social and emotional terms. Peberdy observes:

> The recuperation of masculinity for the contemporary man ultimately depends on the extrication of the boy from the mother, the husband from the wife, the man from the woman and it is only in the company of other men that man's "inner warrior" can be revealed (236).

Andrea Dworkin, writing from a strongly emphatic feminist position, suggests the causes and consequences of this:

> The boy escapes into manhood, into power. It is his option, based on the social valuation of his anatomy. This route of escape is the only one now chartered. But the boy remembers, he always remembers, that once he was a child, close to women in powerlessness, in potential or actual humiliation, in danger from male aggression. The boy must build up a male identity, a fortressed castle with an impenetrable moat, so that he is inaccessible, so that he is invulnerable to the memory of his origins, to the sorrowful or enraged calls of the women he left behind. The boy, whatever his chosen style, turns martial in his masculinity, fierce, stubborn, rigid, humourless: his fear of men turns into aggression against women (1981: 50).

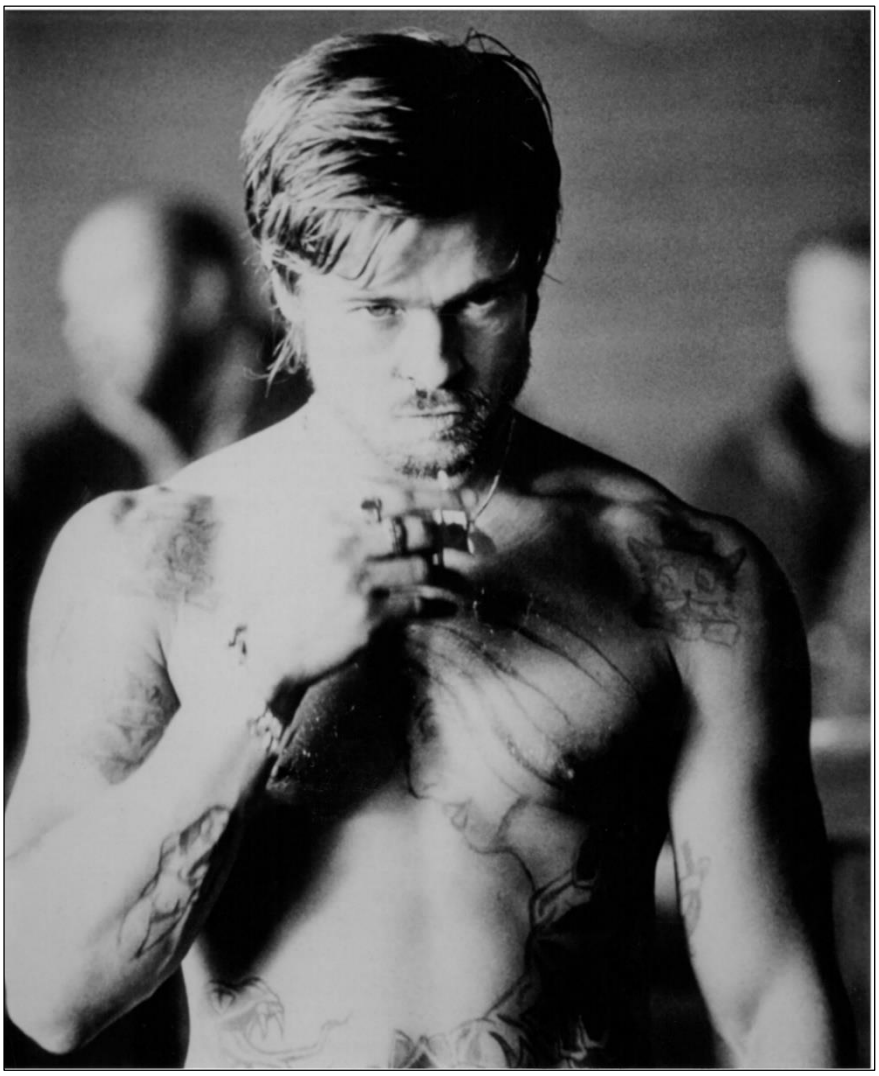
In this sense, taking its cue from Bly's jeremiad against women's emasculating power, *Fight Club* dramatizes a reinforcement of tough masculinity which is predicted on communal, collective male validation. This brings to mind Hawks's all-male worlds and Peckinpah's underscoring of the male bunch, where men appraise each other and find themselves at ease in homosocial bonding.

The above films can be read as a reaction to the musing protagonists of the late sixties and seventies, who, beset by melancholia, were no longer goal-driven but rather trapped in emotional paralysis. Even when engaged in action, driven by revenge, as in *Point Blank*, or pursuing unrealistic goals, as in most of Peckinpah's films, these protagonists' intents lead invariably to *cul-de-sac* situations. *Falling Down* and *Fight Club* are, nonetheless, fascist endorsements of male supremacy, flagging a misogynist stance and a right wing view of liberation movements, whereas *Magnolia* is aware of the specious nature underlying the rhetoric of male victimization, exposing its fallacy. I would argue that American cinema of the late 80s and 90s has responded to the sensitive, anxiety-ridden protagonists with rage

and resentment, stating that feminism has confused and softened men and advocating a regression to the "primeval" instincts as endorsed by Bly and also endorsed by a plethora of books on self-help and even by other, more academically regarded, conservative sources.[51] There is a sense of loud desperation in this process bearing out the view that recent expressions of misogyny may have resulted from an anxious reaction to women's liberation. No wonder that this process has culminated in a retreat to adolescent super-heroes as trends in contemporary cinema seem to confirm.

As Stallone's Rambo stated in *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) "Are we getting to win this time?" Trying to stave off the wounding caused by a militarily-grounded sense of loss, masculinity is always already about power and the need to reconfigure that power whenever it is threatened in its self-assigned hegemony. Nowhere is this desperate but at the same time ludicrous attempt to vindicate dominance more suggestively portrayed than at the end of *Carnal Knowledge* (1971) where Jack Nicholson /Jonathan's misogyny and his inability to commit to any enduring relationship are exposed by his sexual dysfunction and his ludicrous erection at the reassuring words of a prostitute who, in order to get him aroused, articulates the well-learned soothing mantra that he is a "real man", one that "woman resents", "a man who inspires worship" because he has himself and does not need anyone else. Only by listening to how "masculine, extraordinary, robust and domineering" he is, can he be sexually active. "It's up, it's in the air", she announces as he smiles triumphantly.

[51] Sally Robinson analyses in detail Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (1987), Dinesh *D'Souza's Illiberal Education: The Policy of Race and Sex on Campus* (1991) Michael Crichton's *Disclosure* (1993), arguing how these books are predicated on on a rhetoric of masculinity in crisis.



30. Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) displaying through violence his "true" masculinity, endorsing the teachings of Robert Bly in David Fincher's *Fight Club.*

ii- Women in the Western: of saloon girls and schoolmarms

"You don't know about victory. You're a woman."
Colonel Frank Marston (Robert Preston) in Anthony Mann's *The Last Frontier* (1955)

The striking remark of Preston's character to his own wife in Anthony Mann's *The Last Frontier* strongly affirms the peripheral role to which women have been ascribed in American cinema and, more particularly, in the Western genre. The remark becomes perversely ironic if one thinks of the way this character, throughout the narrative, is obsessed with a victory he can never achieve, much like Thursday in Ford's *Fort Apache* or Major Dundee. The stereotyped roles which the Western invariably afforded women raises the question whether the genre itself harbors at its heart a misogynistic leaning which denies women's significance and subsumes them as instrumental under the male imperatives of the genre. In fact, Pam Cook emphasizes that there is a schism between women's historical participation in the pioneer adventure and the marginalization to which the genre seems to consign them. She observes:

> Recently, the American West has once again become disputed territory. Historians have turned their attention to women's participation in the westward trek and have discovered, to no great surprise, that their real contribution was far more extensive and diverse than traditional histories and literature have led us to believe. When it comes to movies, the picture is much the same, the impoverished range of female stereotypes on offer (mother, schoolteacher, prostitute, saloon girl, rancher, Indian Squaw, bandit) never matches up to reality. In the epic battle between heroes to tame the wilderness, the heroines who fought to change the course of history (the suffragettes, farmers, professional women) fare badly - even the maligned American Indian has been afforded the dubious luxury of liberal assessment (1998: 293).

Historical relevance apart, what interests me here is the world of cinematic representations and in particular how the Western genre treats women. Anthony Mann once said that "Without a woman, a Western wouldn't work" (as quoted in Lucas 1998: 306), something opposed by Budd Boetticher who argued: "What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one…who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance" (as quoted in Cook 1998: 293). These

contradictory views could not express more clearly the double-bind position that the genre has ascribed to female roles. The Western is obsessed with images of manhood, and yet those images also find themselves largely in relation to women whose judgments can serve to validate what it means to be a man. Hence, they often take on a critical role in vindicating an image of masculinity infatuated with violence; they brood over its consequences but also posit a strong rationale for its deployment.

For Jane Tompkins, Westerns emerged out of the need to meet the challenge of best-selling novels written by female writers in the mid-19th century. They centered on women's struggles "to live up to an ideal of Christian virtue" (38) and the action unfolded mainly in domestic, private spaces as opposed to the mesas and buttes foregrounded in familiar Western landscapes. At the heart of the Western genre lies thus an urgency to steer away from a fictional world teeming with emotion and spirituality which was deemed feminine and emasculating for warrior manhood. As she observes:

> The Western answers the domestic novel. It is the antithesis of the cult of domesticity that dominated American Victorian culture. The Western hero, who seems to ride in out of nowhere, in fact comes riding in out of the nineteenth century. And every piece of baggage he doesn't have, every word he doesn't say, every creed in which he doesn't believe is there absent for a reason. What isn't there in the Western hasn't disappeared by accident; it's been deliberately jettisoned. The surface cleanness and simplicity of the landscape, the story line, and the characters derive from the genre's will to sweep the board clear of encumbrances. And of some encumbrances more than others. If the Western deliberately rejects evangelical Protestantism and pointedly repudiates the cult of domesticity, *it is because it seeks to marginalize and suppress the figure who stood for these ideals* (39). (my italics)

This figure is the woman, the wife and the mother who, in the construction of manhood that the genre fosters, can be seen an "encumbrance", to use Tompkins's word. Silence and taciturnity are coterminous with an image of "sexual potency and integrity" (Tompkins: 54) and point to the heroes' independence from any relational commitment. Again, as Tompkins puts it:

> The interdiction masculinity imposes on speech rises from the desire of complete objectification. And this means being conscious of nothing, not knowing that one has

> a self. To be a man is not only to be monolithic, silent, mysterious, impenetrable as a desert butte, it is to be the desert butte. By becoming a solid object, not only is a man relieved of the burden of relatedness and responsiveness to others, he is relieved of consciousness itself, which is to say, primarily consciousness *of* self (57).

Tompkins in a humorous side-note even wonders what would happen if Shane did come back as little Joe pleaded with him at the end of the film: "What would it be like to spend long days with this edgy, introverted person, with hair-trigger reflexes and an indigestible past?" (128). She also observes:

> Silence, the will to dominate, and an unacknowledged suffering aren't a good recipe for happiness or companionability. The model of heroism Westerns provide may help men to make a killing in the stock market, but it doesn't provide much assistance when they go home for dinner at night (128).

Blake Lucas, on the other hand, argues that the oft-held idea that women in Westerns are unimportant pays disservice to the pivotal role and narrative significance that female characters, even in the more classical renditions of the genre, have had. He argues that one should reappraise classical Western female characters and not simply dismiss them as passive since they represent an important terrain for reflection on the way the genre tackles gender relations and the representation of love and sexual desire. Thus, he states:

> Of all the misconceptions which have come to attach themselves to the Western, none is more saddening or wrong-headed than the notion that women are unimportant in it. When they are conceded a place in accounts of the genre, it is customarily a marginal one or at best a significant but strictly symbolic role. The myth that the traditional heroine of a western is a passive and pallid figure has inevitably led to the belief that her role must be subverted, and it can be interesting for a woman to literally shoot her way into the center of the action. But scorn of the more familiar types of women presents to us the depressing possibility that the classical western - a genre without equal in its 1946-1964 golden age - may come to be undervalued and rejected as a model, and that along with this, many Western heroines who have never been truly appreciated will be forgotten (1998: 301).

Interestingly, a film like *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954) places two women as central to the narrative, endowed with strong-willed natures and the capacity to act on their own. Their antagonism and competition is pivotal in the unraveling of events and the two men

to whom their attention and interest are directed are subversively consigned to more passive, hence feminized, positions. Tellingly, they are constructed as objects of female sexual desire, which undermines a long-held tradition in the gender-constructions of the Western whereby the male gaze takes a dominant and often sadistic position. No wonder the names of both male characters, Johnny Guitar and Dancing Kid, seem to evoke more of an escapist fantasy, and the attendant promise of pleasure and recreation (playing and dancing) that seems at odds with the familiar displays of marksmanship ingrained in the genre's dictates. The focus strays away from the angst-ridden gunfighter to concentrate on the strong personalities of the two main heroines, Vienna played by Joan Crawford and Emma played by Mercedes McCambridge. Bringing to mind as contextually and historically distant a film as *Klute* (Alan J. Pakula, 1971) which like *Johnny Guitar* is named after its less central male protagonist, both films deny the promise of a male-oriented plot to bring into focus the centrality of female desire, equivocating on agency ascribed to men. Whilst they appear to be the axis around which events revolve, they constitute rather life-alternatives, a possible avenue to "what women want".

In a related vein, *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946) centers on Pearl (Jennifer Jones) a half-breed who is emotionally divided between two brothers, Jesse (Joseph Cotten) representing the law-abiding principles and civilizing, progressive values and Lewt (Gregory Peck) epitomizing, through his reckless behavior, the pleasures of an unbridled sexuality that the female protagonist must ward off in order to secure her social integration. The struggle between the super ego and its repressive, castigating forces is set off against the unrepressed urges of the id, represented by the passionate sexual desire which Lewt offers. Tania Modleski (1997) enlarging upon Mulvey's reading of the film which envisioned Pearl's division between the two brothers as a sign of her internal struggle between passivity and phallic activity casts light on the idea that Pearl's surrender to the dangerous sexual freedom represented by Lewt, leading to her subsequent demise, is not devoid of racial stereotyping. In fact, the film foregrounds her Indian-side as the one that allows her to indulge in more male-directed activities such as shooting or riding. Her relinquishing of psychic defensive mechanisms against the (craved for) sexual abandonment posited by her liaison with the ruthless and sexually alluring Lewt is revealed as less a sign of weakness

than the race-based uncontrollable nature of her "wild", deemed more primitive, Indian background. This recalls Ford's *My Darling Clementine* when Wyatt Earp voices his biased vision of the Indians unable to control their more "primitive" instincts: "What town is this that gives liquor to Indians?" he asks by holding aloft the law of repressive forces. Likewise, he threatens the unruly, sexually taunting Chihuahua (Linda Darnell) with eviction to the Indian reservation where alone, in his biased view, she belongs.

Like Joan Crawford' s Vienna in *Johnny Guitar*, Alter Keane, played by Marlene Dietrich in *Rancho Notorious* (Fritz Lang, 1952) is also the embodiment of a strong-willed heroine who can oscillate between the erotic saloon-girl or the profit-minded ranch owner - the ranch being a refuge for outlaws - which she rules with financial savvy. She is first seen singing with a detached *ennui* for a male audience more willing to grope her than appreciate her singing skills. She is fired because she does not "smile enough" but she is capable of standing on her own as an independent woman. Garbed in male attire like Vienna or decked out with jewelry and donning glamorized dresses, she is the epitome of the dominatrix (read threatening woman) who questions masculine hegemony and thus her demise is necessary for the genre's vindication of masculine authority. Exposing the male heroes' inadequacy and failures, Lang prefers to dwell on Alter's strength, her poignant perception of aging, her fading glamour. More than in *Destry Rides Again* (George Marshall, 1939), where her European charisma is neutralized by comic inflections, *Rancho Notorious* cashes in on Dietrich's strong persona, evoking the cabaret-eroticism of her roles in Sternberg's films. As Florence Jacobowitz states:

> The Dietrich persona is emblematic of the radical potential of female stars to summon forth unspoken desires for protest and self-determination. Recalling the intense pleasure viewers derived from identification with the star's insolence, resistance and strength, Lang reinvents the saloon girl/prostitute stereotype as a woman who is practical, self-sufficient and nobody's property (1996: 98).

Both Vienna and Alter epitomize an alternative representation of womanhood which departs from the saloon-girl stereotype by endowing these characters with an authority that the Western had only found in men. However, in their strength they emulate men's

self-sufficiency, hinting at the idea that the only way to assume an independent role in a masculine environment is to adopt a butch demeanor. This is in sharp contrast to Jane Russell's sexualized, erotic function in Howard Hughes's *The Outlaw* (1943), where she is capable of rehabilitating Billy the Kid through the warmth of her body. We can thus see how the genre may position women within such different gendered dynamics. Philip French observes:

> Westerns of course have to feature women if only because commercial movies must offer some so-called romantic interest. When women take the center of the stage in this most masculine of genres, the result is less likely to be a blow in favour of sexual equality than a strong whiff of erotic perversity (41).

Howard Hawks's heroines in *Red River* (1948) and *Rio Bravo* (1959) also project a strong-willed female nature which is pitted against John Wayne's stalwart demeanor but their rebelliousness is too fleeting and decorous to be felt as more than a curious tic in the narrative. Hence, they eventually break down crying as a sign of their "female sensitivity". This brings to mind *Calamity Jane* (David Butler, 1953) where we witness Calamity (Doris Day)'s breaking down crying over unrequited love, whereupon her long-life stagecoach companion eggs her on: "Come on, cry… show that you are a woman".

31. John Wayne as John T. Chance is often challenged by Feathers (Angie Dickinson)'s erotic allure.

And yet, despite these shifts in points of view which ruffle the surface of the traditional Western hero, concerned with "the problem of what it means to be a man" (Mitchell: 3), it is apparent that the genre has never been at ease with women, preferring to simplify their narrative function by casting them either as unsullied, pure virgins - Lucy-Mallory types - or saloon, dance-hall girls, a fairly thin euphemism for prostitution. The most telling representation of this split is the one afforded by Clementine (Cathy Downs) and Chihuahua in Ford's *My Darling Clementine*. This opposition is also mapped out in geographical terms, where the civilizing forces of the East are set against the untamed wilderness of the West. This acquires a sexualized resonance since the Eastern woman is often presumed virginal and untarnished, as represented by Clementine, contrasting with the erotic, earth-bound force of characters like Chihuahua - or even interesting examples of worldly-wise, mature women such as Marty (Shirley Jones) in *Two Rode Together* (1961). Her whimsical repartee with Richard Widmark and the unease she inspires in Stewart's character confirms the

erotic input of many female characters in classical narratives. Pam Cook observes about the dichotomy that is foregrounded in *My Darling Clementine*:

> Similar tensions are worked through *My Darling Clementine* (1946) where East meets West in the confrontation between schoolteacher Clementine and westerner Wyatt Earp. Clementine is a civilizing influence on Earp, but he makes the passage from Nature to Culture unwillingly, as though resisting the colonizing impetus of the east; and while the wild saloon girl Chihuahua is banished from the scene, her memory lurks in the shadows as a reminder of what civilization represses (295).

32. Chihuahua in *My Darling Clementine* epitomizing the saloon-girl here surrounded by Wyatt Earp (Henry Fonda) and Doc Holliday (Vitor Mature)

If women were pivotal in the westward adventure but marginalized by cinematic narratives, it is not surprising, then, that Women's Liberation helped bring into focus these hitherto neglected heroines, attempting to subvert the centrality of the male point of view. In the thrust of revisionist trends which the late sixties and seventies brought about, in Westerns like *The Hired Hand* (Peter Fonda, 1971) or *Comes a Horse Man* (Alan J. Pakula, 1978), women take center stage and assert themselves as independent of masculine

protection. Significantly, in *The Hired Hand* women's sexual desire is conspicuously laid bare, divested of any morally constraints and thus indifferent to the imposition of the "Cult of True Womanhood" most prominent "between 1820 and 1860" as described by Maureen T. Schwarz (2013: 54), a code which aligned femininity with "submissiveness, purity and domesticity" (54). Appositely, after a seven-year absence and returning home with his ever-present companion Arch (Warren Oates), Harry (Peter Fonda) finds out that his estranged wife, Hannah, (Verna Bloom) has not only managed to look after her farm, relying on her skills and ingenuity, but has frequently engaged in sexual relations with her "hired hands". The film is grounded in the liberationist trends of the 60s and 70s, accepting women's sexual desire and, to some extent, exposing men's homo-social bonding as a craven escape from the commitments implicit in heterosexual relations and the attendant routine of a more domestic existence. Interestingly enough, when Arch asks Hannah why she hasn't got a dog, living on her own, she answers "had one once but he ran away and never bothered to get another". The underlying suggestion is that both dog and husband are runaways but both are functionally unnecessary and replaceable, as evidenced by the seven-year absence writ large. These films were coeval to Peckinpah's working period but whereas the former attempt to accommodate the new spirit of liberation, exposing the imbalance of heterosexual relations in the genre, Peckinpah's obsession with a male ethos never integrates women as equal partners of their protagonist figures but prefers to instrumentalise them as objects of desire or as encumbrances to male endeavours.

Another interesting example which attempts to revise the Western by foregrounding female concerns and relegating men to a supporting, peripheral position is Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993). The title bears strong resemblance with *The Ballad of Josie* (Andrew V. McLaglen 1967) a film which also centered on a female heroine, played by Doris Day, who sets up a sheep farm after the death of her alcoholic, ineffectual husband, setting off a range war with her farming derring-do. Although the film is comedy-inflected, there is an underlying feminist message which is borne out by Josie's individual struggle to circumvent opposing patriarchal forces that attempt to destroy what she has managed to build. The film, by playing upon questions of gender construction and

subversive cross dressing, evokes *Calamity Jane*, also played by Doris Day in David Butler's film (1953). Both films posit women's taking on of a more action-driven, allegedly masculine position as a temporary expedient before donning again female attire and hence effacing the implied equivocation on gender blurring. Apropos of this play with gender boundaries, Tania Modleski critiques Kitses's view of Elsa in Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country,* when he observes that her growth is aligned with "her finally accepting the right costume" (2004: 209). Modleski challenges Kitses by arguing:

> As this description suggests the film's narrative deals with exceptional clarity how anxiety about the decline of male potency (and the threat of male sexual subversion) is linked to the fear that the Western is nothing but a show, nothing but theater, and that in such a show women may easily move out of their appointed place, and chaos will reign (1997: 523).

The Western thus gives some leeway to exploring gender subversion by introducing tomboyish figures, the likes of Calamity Jane, but it reassures us that in the end chaos will not reign. And yet, despite this, as Pam Cook observes, "the passage to femininity is not always smooth; the bad girl's vacillation between tomboy and wife, with its attendant cross-dressing games, offers some interesting possibilities (296).

Greenwald's film traces the life of Jo Monaghan (Suzy Amis) who is cast out by her family for bearing a child as a result of her having been seduced by the photographer who took the family's photo and her own. Whilst she begins metaphorically as object of the male gaze, she becomes progressively more autonomous and driven by the pursuit of her own aims. Jo is from the outset the victim of an oppressive society and escapes the threat of impending rape and the predictable fall into prostitution by dressing up as a man (for which she has to cut her own hair and slash her face so that it becomes scarred) and taking on the job as a sheepherder working for a man named Frank (Bo Hopkins), who becomes her life-long friend never suspecting her true identity. Isolated in the wilderness, she comes up against different obstacles, overcomes adversity and eventually takes home an Asian man as a house-keeper, who discovers her hoax and becomes her lover. In a compelling reading of the film, Tania Modleski argues that it dramatizes Judith Butler's conception of gender

as performativity, suggesting at the same times a "link between oppressed people, in this case the white women and the Chinese men"(1997: 532), and positing cross-dressing as a disruptive narrative element which undermines the strongly male-oriented milieu of the genre. Moreover, the film exposes the brutality of frontier life, by laying bare the crass behavior and the proneness to sexual violence that Jo comes up against in her close contact with the different men with whom and for whom she has worked. The self-styled mystery of the Western hero is here pared down to disheveled, slovenly exemplars, likely to indulge in violent verbal outbursts and unable to control their scatological discharges.

This same vision can be found in *The Homesman* (Tommy Lee Jones, 2014) where an independent spinster, portrayed as unattractive, takes as her mission the rescuing of mentally disturbed women and their return to their homes in the East. Mary Cummins (Hilary Swank) is aided by a down-on-his-luck drifter and ex-outlaw, George Briggs (Tommy Lee Jones) who accepts the job for lack of other options. The film, as happens in *Little Jo*, showcases how many women could not cope with the harshness of frontier life not because they lacked the means to survive but because they were verbally and sexually victimized by their own companions. Mary ends up committing suicide but not before offering her body to George, out of a sense of poignant despair which the long years of loneliness had made more acute. Although George is emotionally affected by Mary's denouement, the film ends up with him blithely dancing to a tune which a band plays during a river boat crossing. The film is striking in the way it pits women's marginalization and their emotional erosion against white male callousness, locating the roots of their unhinged mental state not in the contact with the Indian-Other, as in *The Searchers,* but in their submission to heterosexual relations based upon aggressiveness and brutal treatment. George's unwitting dancing at the end signs his wish to eschew the discomfort that the sight of those women's plight had aroused in him, opting for a more comfortable and uncompromising detachment despite his temporary consciousness-raising. Thus, contemporary renditions of the genre offer deeper explorations of gender politics than the revisionist Westerns from the late sixties and seventies had already brought to light but the portrait of heterosexual

relations underlying these narratives is clearly embroiled in violence and not unrelated to misogyny.

Even in a lighter mood such as the one we find in *The Quick and the Dead* (Sam Raimi, 1995) which cashes in on Sharon Stone's sexual boldness and on Gene Hackman's prior association with the sadistic Little Bill, it can be argued that the eroticism of Stone's persona undermines the film's attempt at subverting the genre's premises and belies its feminist point of view. In the end, she is the one who leaves town, handing down the law and its symbolic representation of phallic power to the ex-outlaw, turned preacher, played by Russell Crowe. This film, like *Posse* (Mario Van Peebles, 1993) or *Bad Girls* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1994), is embedded in the post-feminist trends of the 90s inasmuch as they display the need to accommodate feminist or racial issues paying lip service to the struggles of the past but maintaining the patriarchal hegemonic models on which the genre has always relied. Thus, their glossy surface made up of stylized gestures where women's and black bodies are objectified and highly sexualized results from a complex undoing and dismantling of liberation movements. Their political and social impact is dismissed since it is assumed to be no longer needed as past iniquities have already been dealt with and resolved. In these the Western becomes gun-fighting masquerade.

Thus, women's representation in the Western has a checkered history which oscillates between marginalization and narrative significance, in which they may be ascribed a recessive role or endowed with agency and independent will as represented by the many examples referenced above. John Cawelti observes: "Yet, a Western without sexism doesn't seem like a Western" (20). Cawelti's comment brings to mind a director like Budd Boetticher who, in his Randolph Scott-starred Westerns, unabashedly locates women as objects of the male gaze often punctuating his narratives with his heroes' remarks on women's attractiveness or even on their ability to cook, betraying a condescending tone: "You cook good coffee, best cooking I had in a long time" as Scott's character tells Karen Steele's Carrie Lee in *Ride Lonesome* or even in *Comanche Station* where the villain Ben Lane observes about the heroine "I would trade her for a herd. Always check the brand to make sure you're not riding another man's stock". Likewise he observes: "You cook good,

Mrs Lowe, a woman should cook good". In *Seven Men from Now* Lee Marvin's Bill Masters with his menacing presence poses a sexual threat to the female character Anne Greer (Gail Russell) waxing lyrical over her beauty and charging his appreciative remarks with sexual innuendo. These Westerns, in their formulaic structure and simplicity, offer a construction of manhood which vindicates its power over women, asserting men's right to exert sexual domination. Appositely, Boetticher's work preceded Peckinpah's and, although his misogyny and condescension passed largely unnoticed, it is no less appalling in such formulaic, and seemingly harmless, films. In the fifties women were often cast in a negative light - *the femme fatale* - as they were threatening patriarchal domination through their progressive emancipation and post-war assertion of their roles in the market place. This would culminate in the subsequent cultural revolutions of the 60s and 70s. Nonetheless, Kitses remarks sympathetically about Boetticher:

> Is it because Boetticher is too modest a target and patently too formalist in his priorities that he has gotten a free pass with feminist and racial perspectives, as if his films were indefensible ideologically? If indefensible, the director's utilitarian treatment of both women and Indians is in keeping with the essentialist approach, the reduction of the genre to its brilliantly clear, pure focus on a modest humanity, facing cosmic questions of meaning and existence (2004: 198).

Boetticher can nevertless be seen as a precursor of Peckinpah's work. Disclosing the same reductionist view of women, manifesting the same fear and anxiety over their sexualized bodies, their individual choices and their social agency, both directors reveal an inability to frame a loving relationship outside the model of male dominance and female subservience.

Although women's marginalized status in the Western stems from the genre's infatuation with male-concerned narratives, this fact *per se* does not necessarily mean that misogyny underlines the genre's form and function. Recalling Ford's heroines would be enough to rebut that assumption. The Western's long-standing belief in "good violence (perpetrated by the hero) and bad violence (that used by the villains in pursuit of their evil aims)" (Cawelti: 15) seems to relegate the misogyny issue to a historical framework where liberationist struggles shed light on imbalanced gender representations which had heretofore passed unnoticed or deemed unthreatening. However, it is also true that the

genre expresses anxiety in relation to the civilizing, domesticating forces which women represent. In their association with community values they are partly embodiments of oppressive forces which constrain the unbridled spirit of manhood rooted in the pioneer myth and in the gun-fighting mystique. As such they can be construed as dangerously emasculating, and calling to mind the theorization in the previous chapter, they prevent men from getting in touch with the primeval instincts of their "true", untamed manhood as the school of Bly might argue. Women make a difference inasmuch as they act as foils to men's endeavors and represent the civilizing forces which Western heroes help strengthen, often through violence. And yet, men fear domesticity inasmuch as it runs counter to the mythic pull of their self-sufficiency.

VIII- Misogyny in the films of Sam Peckinpah: of men's distrust of women

> "I like directing women. I'm not Sam Peckinpah, you know, down in Mexico screwing the whores".
>
> Brian De Palma, as quoted by Bill Mesce Jr[52]

In one of the earliest scenes in *The Killer Elite*, Robert Duvall's George tells James Caan's Mike that he had been "snooping around" the purse which belonged to the young woman Mike had spent the night with. In an outburst of laughter, he tells Mike that he had come across a doctor's letter stating the woman suffered from "vaginal infection". George's revelation is a prank pulled on Mike and they both laugh it off in a blithe mood of male camaraderie. However, George is shown to be a misogynist and the scene is redolent of misogyny, suggesting that women are defiled and dirty and that they might contaminate men with their bodily fluids. Women become object of jeering remarks, the sexualized Other which threatens male territory, the butt of men's jokes, prompting an adolescent expression of homo-social bonding. Later on when Mike asks George why he had not killed him, the latter replies "I liked you". This sort of male love is always placed within the safe ground of companionship and any hints at homosexual love are deflected into the affirmation of male camaraderie. And yet, it traverses Peckinpah's work as an open possibility which, titillating underneath the boisterous banter of his all-male gangs or the erotic repartee between male partners, is constantly disavowed by the asseveration of his protagonists' heterosexuality.

One of the most unpalatable traits associated with Peckinpah's persona as a director is the aura of misogyny which surfaces in many of his cinematic narratives and which he helped substantiate by the careless and provocative remarks he often voiced to the press. His work reveals a disquieting tendency to misogyny registered in the conflict and aggression which he places at the heart of heterosexual relations. As Weddle states: "Don't look to his films for a portrait of a healthy, mutually nurturing marriage. He was much more convincing

[52] In *Peckinpah's Women: A Reappraisal of Women in the Period Westerns of Sam Peckinpah*, page 161, 2001.

when dramatizing the failure of love than depicting its triumph" (1996: 11). My aim is to disclose exactly how this misogyny is dramatized. Taking into account opinions which have attempted to disavow it, I will confront them with counter arguments which confirm Peckinpah's misogynistic inclinations. Not all heterosexual relations portrayed in his films are based on aggression: Kit and Yellowleg, Cable Hogue and Hildy, Ace and Elvira represent the possibility of love and romance, but not surprisingly this possibility is always impaired by deep-seated differences and antagonistic personal goals. That Peckinpah's most significant work was in the Western could be said to subsume the question of misogyny under the general dictates of the genre and perversely this has functioned as one of the main arguments which have palliated his misogynistic leanings. This has justified many critics' dismissal of the issue (Seydor: 1997; Prince: 1998; Fulwood: 2002) but I will attempt to show that this unpalatable question comes to the fore in most of his narratives. At the same time, I will try to argue that it does not wholly disqualify his work, nor the fascination which it has exerted.

Bill Mesce Jr argues that Peckinpah's representation of women in his Western films is embedded in a historical reality in which "the expansion of the United States west of Mississippi was male-originated, male-controlled, and male-dominated" (2001: 81). His words are worth citing at length:

> The point here being that history infuses Peckinpah's period Westerns. Consequently, one gains an insight into Peckinpah's women when one begins to have a better grasp on our traditional ideas of women in the historic West and their mythic derivative. The historical picture may be unsettling from a feminist point of view, but it is one thing to criticize content as the product of a story-teller's indulgence or perpetuation of macho myths and fantasies, but another to chafe over an uncomfortable truth. The harsh conditions and generally second-status of women in the historical Old West belies the popular image of the pioneer wife as partner in the Western adventure, toiling by her husband's side and enthusiastically extending the reach of Eastern civilization. Here, one might think of the fresh-scrubbed Jean Arthur in *Shane* (1953), or the stoic, stolid women in any number of John Ford Westerns. The historical record is less rosy. The pioneer wife did work in the fields but more out of necessity than shared enthusiasm, and she also tended to the endless, back-breaking labor of maintaining a household under brutally primitive conditions. For all her effort, she was still never a true equal partner in the development of the West (80-81).

Mesce Jr's account of women's contribution to the development of the West is however no more than an opinion. It relies on a historical reality which is also not the one represented in classical Western narratives. Despite this, he attempts to ground Peckinpah's reductive vision of women in this narrow historical projection. Thus, on the one hand we have the reality of women, carrying out "back-breaking labor in the fields under brutally primitive conditions", on the other hand, the myth-laden cinematic representations of "fresh-scrubbed faces" which seem untouched by hardship. As I have shown in the previous chapter, quoting Pam Cook, the reality of women in the westward adventure tends to be whittled down to stereotyped visions which tend to efface the historical record, both in films and in mental reconstructions of the past.

Mesce Jr devotes an entire book to reappraising the role of women in Peckinpah's Western films and tries to put forward a credible *apologia* for what he calls his "cinematic sins" which "despite the felony caliber indictments against him, seem of misdemeanor quality" (xxi). As both Prince and Seydor also argue Peckinpah's difficult relationship with journalists, and the way he enjoyed provoking them, contributed to stirring up unhelpful controversy. In a related vein, Mesce Jr states about Peckinpah:

> Often paranoid and insecure about criticism, he was not a film maker to simply roll on with a negative opinion. He could be disproportionately combative. Worse there were times when he seemed to take a childish delight in antagonizing his critics. In an environment where women were actively pushing an agenda of equality, and showing open dismay at the abuse and second-class status they suffered in the media, Peckinpah had the annoying tic of going into such a combustible situation and spouting off igniting remarks (33).

Moreover, Mesce Jr argues that Peckinpah's work emerged at the peak of muddled, troubled historical times, in which the Women's Liberation Movement was gaining momentum, exposing forms of discrimination and abuse. The end of the studio system and the attendant loss of grip on production and exhibition channels meant that roles for women were no longer dictated by studio imposition but followed other trends, oftentimes seeking new forms of exposition, dealing with the dark underside of sexuality and violence. More concretely, Molly Haskell has also argued that these years were the "most

disheartening in screen history" (1987: 323), as far as female roles were concerned, stressing that:

> Directors who in 1962 were guilty of covert misogyny (Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*) or kindly indifference (Sam Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country*) became overt in 1972 with the violent abuse and brutalization of *A Clockwork Orange* and *Straw Dogs*. The growing strength and demands of women in real life, spearheaded by women's liberation, obviously provoked a backlash in commercial films: a redoubling of Godfather-like machismo to beef up men's eroded masculinity or alternately an escape into the all-male world of the buddy movies from *Easy Rider* to *Scarecrow* (323).

By the same token, Joan Mellen expressed her outrage about *The Wild Bunch* by saying: "Peckinpah actually expects us to mourn the diminution of the vital force, the 'masculine' power of these brutish people" (1978: 272). She also states disparagingly:

> The male in the films of Sam Peckinpah, of which *The Wild Bunch* is a virulent example, is no better than the decaying, corrupt world that is squeezing him out. Equating masculinity with sheer barbarism, Peckinpah justifies his cynicism by mythologizing the obsolescence of manliness in civilized America. For Peckinpah, a man is someone violent because he possesses male genitals (270).

Mellen reflects the radical feminist views of Andrea Dworkin who, some years later, would envision heterosexual relations as a mere projection of force and dominance exerted by men over women, always already objectified and debased in subservient positions. Dworkin writes:

> Male sexual power is also expressed through an attitude or quality: virility. Defined first as manhood itself, virility in its secondary meaning is vigour, dynamism (in the patriarchal dictionary inevitably also called force). The vitality inherent in virility as a quality is held to be an exclusive masculine expression of energy, in its basic character sexual, in its origin biological, traceable to the penis itself. It is in fact, an expression of energy, strength, ambition, and assertion. Defined by men and experienced by women as a form of male sexual power, virility is a dimension of energy and self-realization forbidden to women (1981: 23).

What Haskell and Mellen do not give due credit to, while endorsing a feminist point of view coeval to Peckinpah's work, is that his protagonists are far from assured in their possession

of an unassailable phallic power and therefore the Western mold of masculinity on which he draws and from which he departs is itself problematized by his narratives of failure and powerlessness. In a cinema liberated from censorship, Kirshner argues that the "new permissiveness" (85) in representing sexuality in the 60s and 70s perversely resulted in more exploitative ways to feature women's bodies, often imposed as a commercial strategy. Thus, Haskell or Mellen's arguments need greater contextualization in this historical conjuncture.

Tellingly, the popularity of the auteur theory throughout the sixties and seventies, by ascribing artistic responsibility to the director and disclosing idiosyncratic traits as marks of his/her directorial intent, implied that one could unveil in a director's work his/her vision of the world, his/her aesthetic and imaginative imprint. For Peckinpah's detractors, this meant that his views of women were demeaning, a vision reinforced by the controversy that came to a head with *Straw Dogs*. The question of the historical embedding of a director's work, and the way it may be read in a more negative light, brings to mind the polemics around Godard's *Contempt*/ *Le Mépris* which, in its opening sequence, luxuriates in a fetishistic display of different parts of Bardot's naked body. Defending himself against feminist criticisms which accused him of objectifying women by foregrounding their nakedness, however, Godard was far more articulate than Peckinpah in his remarks to the press. Nowell Smith describes the situation:

> The famous scene in *Contempt* with Brigitte Bardot lying naked on a bed asking Michel Piccoli about the attractiveness of her body parts was imposed by the producers who were desperate to get their money's worth out of Bardot's expensively bought presence in the movie. And later, during the making of *British Sounds* in 1969, when feminist Sheila Rowbotham protested to him about the full-front, crotch-level shot of a naked woman in a supposedly political film, Godard is said to have replied, "Don't you think I am able to make a cunt boring?" (59).

Godard's words are equally provocative by reducing femininity to genital organs. Making a "cunt boring" is the rationale for his supposedly political film but underneath the intellectual mantle lurks an instrumentalisation of women insofar as he also cashed in on their beauty as box-office appeal. We only have to think about Jean Seberg in *À Bout de Souffle* (1960) or Ana Karina in *Vivre Sa Vie* (1962). Likewise, Isela Vega or Susan George are

embodiments of a strong sexual allure which, in Peckinpah's world, deserves to undergo some form of punishment.

Peckinpah's familiarity with the generic tropes of the Western and his personal obsession with homosocial bonding become significant when one considers the way women are relegated in his work. Quoted by Jim Kitses, Border Chase - a scriptwriter for many of Anthony Mann's films - defined the relationship between two men as "the greatest love story" (1998: 229), and yet Kitses argued that in Peckinpah's world:

> That love is always threatened. A dominant theme, loyalty, provides the master code of value, loyalty to oneself, loyalty man to man, loyalty to codes, contracts and commitments. *Loyalty to women is not an issue*. But loyalty is an impossible deal, the films tracing the contradictions and fallibility of the characters. Indeed, the action of many of the director's films begins under the sign of betrayal, original sin in Peckinpah (1998: 229). (my italics)

Kitses goes on in another source:

> Given his obsessive focus on an unbalanced manhood defined through bloodshed and alienated from a meaningful social role*, Peckinpah's great flaw, inevitably was his inability to explore and dramatize the feminine. There are few proofs of love to balance the codes and tests of masculinity; women and the family are marginalized and often victimized*. Peckinpah is sometimes seen as cinema's tortured Van Gogh, a creative artist who could do no wrong. Thus, even the brutalization and rape that regularly threaten his heroines are advanced as proof of the director's democratic treatment of women who have to face the same savagery that defines the male. Peckinpah did not look down on women especially, we are told, but "had a low opinion of humankind in general". However, this stretch of logic hardly addresses the imbalances of the typical Peckinpah narrative's emphasis and action, with its heroic structure of deep respect and intimacy between men. Complementing these damaged and alienated heroes, it is logically and inevitably woman as whore that is the director's ideal, at the center of a warm fantasy in his only comic western, *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970). However, in the more violent films the grace notes of warmth and love Peckinpah insinuates are rarely between men and women. As in Anthony Mann's work, the adversarial relationships of his heroes are marked by intense looks exchanged at key moments, the male gaze that is a sign of love that can only be expressed through combat (2004: 203). (my italics)

Kitses affirms that in Peckinpah's violent world, women were peripheral and heterosexual relations were subsumed under the more pressing need to foreground male-to-male

bonding. Thus, the most emotionally charged moments of his narratives happen against the backdrop of homosocial environments and, recalling Willemen's reasoning in part two, page 62, this form of love can only be disavowed through violent combat. The mistreatment of women or their assigned narrative marginality does not merely serve "a genuine narrative purpose" (Fullwood: 151), but bespeaks an uneasiness regarding the way they can pose the threat of emasculation in his testosterone-saturated environments. This calls to mind how Major Dundee's leg wound (with the symbolic implications of loss of potency) is precipitated by his sexual dalliance with Teresa.

Mesce Jr also underlines how rape or the threat of rape in Peckinpah's films borders on the obsessive, and yet he downplays this evidence by arguing that rapists, or those who attempt to inflict rape on female victims, always get their comeuppance. Recalling Haskell and Pauline Kael's critical view of this recurrent motif in Peckinpah's oeuvre, he states:

> Critics like Haskell and Pauline Kael found elements in Peckinpah's violence-ridden film ethos they felt evidenced a repressive, brutal misogyny that both reflected Peckinpah's own retrograde view and a general male oppressive sensibility toward women. The reaction of Haskell *et al*. is understandable. Consider that in the fourteen films directed by Sam Peckinpah, five feature a rape or attempted rape, five feature the murder of a woman with at least thirteen women killed onscreen, six of them in *The Wild Bunch* alone, men are betrayed - or feel betrayed - by their women in four films; and prominent female characters in five Peckinpah films are prostitutes, another is a coke-snorting nymphomaniac, another is so sexually aroused by violence she deserts her husband for the thug who has been tormenting him (6-7).

Mesce Jr offers an appalling tally of examples where women appear either as victims or cast in a negative light which on the surface at least would appear to make a mockery of his attempt to disavow the misogyny issue.

As if the controversy ignited by the release of *Straw Dogs* was not enough Peckinpah, interviewed by William Murray for *Playboy* magazine in 1972, said the following:

> Well, there are two kinds of women. There are women and then there's pussy. A woman is a partner. If you can go a certain distance by yourself, a good woman will triple it. But Amy is the kind of girl - and we've seen them by the millions - they marry, they have some quality, but they're so goddamn immature, so ignorant as far as living goes, as to what is of value in life, in this case about marriage that they destroy it. Amy is pussy under the veneer of being a woman. Maybe because of what happens

> to her she will eventually become a woman (…) to start out with, she was asking for the rape (Keyes 2008: 104).

These words are an absolutely indefensible, reductionist vision of women: they are either good or bad according to their level of commitment to men's endeavors. Moreover, Peckinpah shamelessly debases women's sexuality and demeans their emotional and intellectual capabilities. The outrageous idea that Amy, the character who is raped in *Straw Dogs* was "asking for it" and will eventually "become a woman", by going through sexual abuse, seems a pure expression of Peckinpah's misogynistic stance which indicates how he frames women's sexuality within a phallocentric vision. He also depicts women as sexual *provocateurs*, capable of deception and betrayal. In this same notorious interview, Peckinpah tries to put forward a reason for David's having married Amy by saying:

> Come on, that's beneath you. Most of us marry pussy one time or another. A smart, unscrupulous cunt can always get her looks to get some poor slob to marry her. And in marriage, so often, especially if the man is lonely, he will clothe her in the vestments of his own needs - and if she's young, she will do the same to him. They don't really look at what they want that person to be. All of a sudden the illusion wears off and they really see each other and they say, "Hey, what's all this about?" Now that David can see himself too, he can begin to build his life. As for her, probably she will never change (Hayes: 105).

Peckinpah's derogatory comments on Amy's sexual ploys, her "unscrupulous cunt" as he mentions, and even her inability to change - while David is able to move on and build his life - express a derisive view of women's physical and psychological natures which seems to articulate a chronic fear of losing control. If his remarks on *Straw Dogs* were deliberately provocative, he was also aware that his interview would address a *Playboy* reading audience for whom "pussy" is a marketable commodity. We should not forget that the historical moment in which he lived and worked placed him in a position where his skewed views on women and on heterosexual relations could be articulated. The synecdoche "cunt" to signify women, whether they may be "boring" as in Godard or "unscrupulous" as in Peckinpah, is an objectionable expression pointing to the reductionist cinematic

representation of women which, in the late 60s and 70s, as Haskell suggests, is unashamedly exposed.

About this, Prince's words exemplify how many critics attempt to assuage the impact of Peckinpah's own excesses, dismissing the intentionality of his statements: "When he was not baiting his critics, Peckinpah could be candid about the design of the film" (127). He was not above changing his tune; interestingly, he even wrote letters to critics Richard Shickel and Pauline Kael explaining that David was really "the heavy" (127) and thus highlighting the flaws and inadequacies of the main protagonist. Peckinpah himself revealed contradictory feelings regarding his own film, making observations which muddle the psychology of the characters and hint at his own internal confusion about the sexual violence the film disturbingly portrays. Linda Ruth Williams, apropos of the notorious rape scene in *Straw Dogs,* observes in an article for *Sight and Sound*:

> All the time she screams "No, no, no." as her actions are saying "Yes, yes, yes"- fear is turned into arousal. It's an image of the complicit rape victim that's as old as misogyny, here all the more astonishing for the audacity and clarity with which it is represented. She doesn't know what she wants, so he is going to give her what's good for her. An act which starts as rape ends as lovemaking, and Amy's orgasmic expressions and grateful tears are viewed and heard largely from the point of view of the rapist (1995: 26).

About the second sexual attack, she writes:

> The second scene is incredibly disturbing, not only because of what it is in itself, but also because of what it implies about the earlier act. If this is "bad rape" then the first rape must have been "good". In *Straw Dogs* discourse, rape is not merely negative - it all depends on who is doing it to you (26).

Thus, irrespective of Peckinpah's arguments and his recognition of David's repressed violence, the unsavory quality of the scene and the way it equivocates on Amy's response hints at a pornographic fantasy that "women's sexual pleasure is elicited involuntarily" (Williams 1999: 50). Dworkin then generalizes from this proposition:

> The essence of rape, then is the conviction that no woman, however clearly degraded by what she does, is a victim. If the harlot nature of the female is her true nature,

> then nothing that signifies or reveals that nature is either violating or victimizing (138).

She underlines strongly that rape, in a world dominated by phallocentric power, is embedded in a twisted pornographic projection where women comply with their attackers and willingly submit to virile power. She expands on this distorted vision which she deems deeply pornographic and misogynistic:

> The woman is acted on; the man acts and through action expresses sexual power, the power of masculinity. Fucking requires that the male act on one who has less power and this valuation is so deep, so completely implicit in the act, that the one who is fucked is stigmatized during the act even when not anatomically female. In the male system, sex is the penis, the penis is sexual power, its use in fucking is manhood (23).

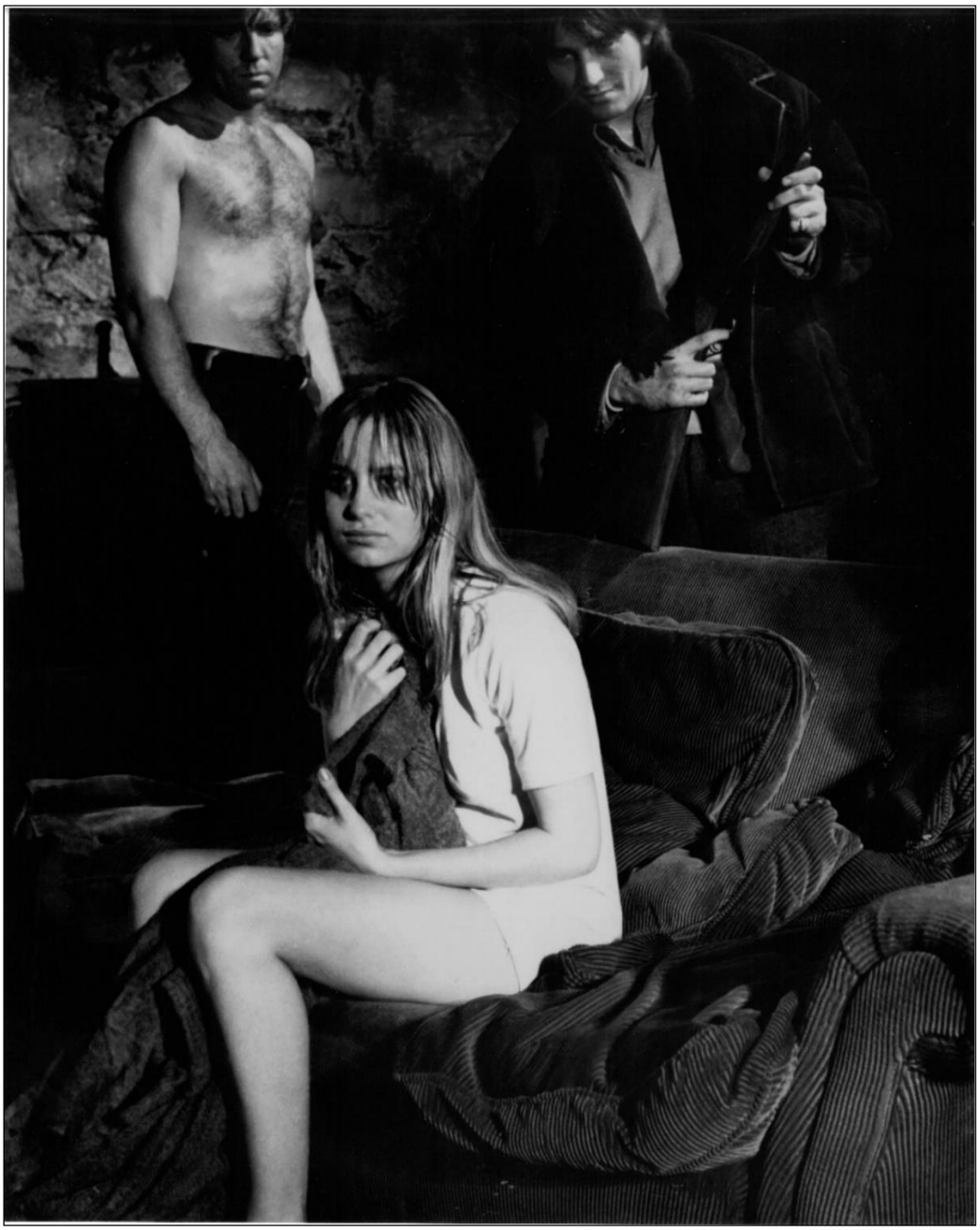
She also adds:

> The values are the standard values of pornography: the excitement of humiliation, the joy of pain, the pleasure of abuse, the magnificence of cock, the woman who resists only to discover that she loves it and wants more (215).

Peckinpah himself went so far as to emphasise that any heterosexual relation is based on physical aggression, unwittingly confirming Dworkin's views. In fact he said in his *Playboy* interview:

> The basic male act, by its very nature, starts out as an act of physical aggression, no matter how much love it eventually expresses, and the woman's begins as one of passivity, of submission. It's a physical act. Except to a bull dyke. Not that I'm knocking Lesbianism. I consider myself one of the foremost male Lesbians in the world (Hayes: 106).

This final remark shows just how enmeshed in ignorance and facetiousness Peckinpah is. Trying to justify what happens in *Straw Dogs*, and Peckinpah's defense of it, leaves his apologists with a mountain to climb.



33. Amy (Susan George) after having been raped by Venner and Scutt in *Straw Dogs's* most controversial scene.

Peckinpah later made attempts to recant his *Playboy* interview. The ideas he projects with his undue remarks seem to collude with what T. Walter Herbert defines as rapists' delusional fantasies. This delusion becomes even more alarming when taking up residence in the minds of men who are not rapists. He writes:

> Rapists sometimes claim that the assault exposes a woman's hypocrisy, that she assumes a false mantle of innocence and virtue, but that her conduct during the rape reveals that she yearns for it, and that she is actually "very experienced". The rapists sometimes imagine that his victim discovered desires she had kept secret from herself, and that his attack struck home to her inner truth (35).

He continues:

> Rape fantasies are produced by an imaginative activity that conceals its own traces: men chronically inhabit a delusional subjective reality in which they are teased by sexually provocative women who pretend to lack sexual desire, only to reveal it once assaulted (36).

The contemporaneous Hitchcock film *Frenzy* (1972) illustrates uneasily how the hatred of women can be grounded in masculine insecurity, inasmuch as sexual violence springs, among other things, from anxiety regarding women's newly refashioned social roles marked by economic independence and their escape from the domestic sphere. The way the killer rapes and strangles his victims reflects the sadistic desire to impose domination which has been imperiled by women's liberation from domesticity and passivity. This is dramatized in the film by one of the victim's successful career and her economic superiority regarding her ex-husband and other men in general. The scene where the rapist's comments regarding her body shift from "lovely" to "bitch" is a remarkable dramatization of sexual desire transmuted into sexual violence, since this seems to become the only way to vindicate an imperiled domination. Significantly, Herbert also states:

> Sexual desire is among the subversive experiences that disconcert masculine self-command and thus menace masculine self-respect. Sexual yearnings place a man at another person's disposal, subject to that person's impulses and decisions (42).

The seventies witnessed a surge in rape-revenge movies which, while seeming to pay lip service to women's concerns and apparently exposing their sexual objectification, in fact indulged in graphically twisted forms of revenge. *Hannie Caulder* (Burt Kennedy, 1971) is an example of how the Western also attempted to accommodate this trend by foregrounding a female heroine played by Raquel Welch who, teaming up with a bounty

hunter (Robert Culp), exacts revenge on the three rapists who sexually assaulted her and killed her husband. The film brings into focus Welch's sexual allure in many scenes where her body is objectified for the male gaze, undermining any serious intention to tackle the subject from women's point of view. As Peter Lehman observed, in his compelling analysis of representations of male bodies in the cinema, rape revenge movies are less concerned with the question of rape than with the male masochistic pleasure of witnessing beautiful, sensual women taking revenge on the men who had attacked them; the protracted graphic details and the eroticized scenarios in which the vengeful acts take place heighten the underlying masochistic pleasure of the male gaze. Lehman comments thus:

> Men in these films are victims of violent women. This reverses the usual pattern of suspense and horror films in which a dangerous man systematically terrorizes and victimizes women. Moreover, these films which are nearly always made by and for men, revel in the spectacle of a woman killing men in a gruesome and protracted fashion. Sometimes the contexts are even overly erotic, as in *I Spit on your Grave*, when the avenging woman leads a victim to believe that she is about to make love to him but instead slips a noose around his neck and hangs him, or, in a similar scene, when she cuts off her victim's penis (1993: 124).

Rape has often been posited as a threat in Westerns, as in Anthony Man's *Winchester 73* where the character played by Shelley Winters is constantly abused and pushed around by burly, boorish men or in *The Man of the West* where this sexual threat acquires a disquieting dimension when Link Jones eventually finds his female companion in a bedraggled state, having been raped by the character's own uncle, his erstwhile crime partner. In *Three Mules for Sister Sara* (Don Siegel, 1970) Eastwood's Hogan saves Sara (Shirley MacLaine) from being raped by a group of roughnecks. The film plays upon the long-held dichotomy between unsoiled schoolmarms and sexually dubious saloon girls by exploring MacLaine's mixed identity, her sexual brazenness constantly clashing with her attempts to project a demure stance which gives rise to moments of comedy. Her fierce political commitment justifies her acts although her character holds a morality as questionable and muddied as the one endorsed by the self-sufficient male hero. Interestingly, Eastwood's macho persona seems to finesse the question of misogyny in his films, as he oftentimes aligns himself with the marginalized and the disenfranchised. And

yet, in *High Plains Drifter* (Clint Eastwood, 1973) he punishes the town's "broad" for bumping into him on purpose by dragging her, caveman-like style, to the nearby barn and, despite her seemingly dramatized rejection, she submits willingly to his sexual advances. That this unsavoury scene passed muster as a narrative ploy that vindicates the protagonist's escalating scheme of revenge, bears out how Eastwood's masculinity licensed what could be read as a sexual form of aggression.

As explored in the previous chapter, powerful masculine images often entail emotional restraint in many film narratives. Herbert writes about this:

> Students of contemporary masculinity have noted the prevalence of a "non-relational" sexuality in which sexual intimacy is divorced from emotional intimacy. The "centerfold syndrome" is an example of this: men caught up in a persistent fantasy life that feeds on images of women with whom they will never exchange a word, while they feel sexually awkward with actual women who love them (…). The "male role" is not merely a list of traits, but takes meaning from its dynamic interplay with other roles. Men and women are not free-standing statuary, but are always inter-defining. The dominant American tradition of manhood visualizes a lone figure against a vast horizon, on horseback in the Wild West version, a myth that denies the interactive dramas that make us who we are and sustain us in the selfhoods by which we know each other and ourselves (42-43).

If the Western, as Tompkins suggests, developed as a reaction to the popularity of women's fiction in the mid-19th century, "striving to cast out everything that is feminine" (127), it is thus a genre where misogyny may surface in many guises. Needless to say, it tends to foreground an image of manhood which is deeply suspicious of femininity. As Tompkins observes:

> In the effort to free itself from the suffocating restrictions of Victorian social mores - temperance, sexual repression, elaborate dress codes, Anglophile gentility, evangelical piety, and the worship of domesticity and highbrow culture for their own sake - the Western paints itself into another kind of corner. Striving to be the opposite of women, the male heroes restrict themselves to a pitiably narrow range of activities. They can't read or dance or look at pictures. They can't play. They can't rest. They can't look at the flowers. They can't cook or sew or keep house, or carry a conversation for more than a couple of sentences. They can't not know something, or ask someone else the way. They can't dream or fantasize or play the fool. They can't make mistakes (127).

I would contend, however, that Peckinpah's protagonists do make egregious mistakes; they break from the mold which Tompkins describes expressively.

In an interview with Dan Yergin, Peckinpah described himself as a "good whore", adding "I go where I'm kicked" (Hayes: 84). Although his words appear to criticise the economic imperatives of the film industry, in which he had to ply his trade by "whoring" himself to the system, they also suggest Peckinpah's fondness for prostitutes, registered by many accounts and given great emphasis by David Weddle, who also elaborates on his philandering and his abusive treatment of women. Katherine Haber, Peckinpah's production assistant and his companion for most of the 1970s[53], bore the brunt of his psychic instability and even endured his violent spells. Marshall Fine quotes Bobby Visciglia, Peckinpah's prop assistant, who describes how Katy was the victim of battering: "But Sam could be vicious with women: he'd hit them. This time he punched Katy and knocked her down the stairs" (220). To Max Evans, in a long interview, she describes the masochist sense of loyalty she had for Peckinpah - which made her endure years of his constant boozing, drug abuse and mood swings - Haber remarks: "He was like an infection; he was like a disease. Once you caught the Peckinpah disease, you couldn't get rid of him (2014: 140). His often aggressive behavior with women, his compulsive womanizing and contrarian manner, which moved easily from the chivalric to the brutal, goes some way towards explaining the mixed feelings he expressed for his female characters and the unreliability they often suggest.

Since prostitutes often appear in Peckinpah's films and have been construed as evidence of his reductive view of women, Mesce Jr attempts to challenge this argument by stating that prostitution was a common means of survival in the West as women plied this trade around the male-populated mining camps and settlements. In his view Peckinpah once again is only being truthful to the history of pioneer adventure. He states:

> With all these circumstances in mind, one can posit the rise of prostitution in the West as inevitable. It matched a largely unskilled population and the poor financial

[53] "Peckinpah's Girl Friday - and Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday" as described by Max Evans, (2014: 97).

> prospect of "legitimate" work with the outstanding scarcity of women in the region (82).

Even Mesce Jr is not blind to the fact that the cinematic representation of prostitutes does not mirror the degrading conditions in which they lived. The exception to the euphemistically portrayed saloon girl might be found in Altman's *McCabe and Mrs Miller* where the despair of a prostitute leads her to attack a client with a knife. He observes:

> The profession could be harsh. The light-hearted, healthy and unfailingly attractive nymphs that populate bordellos in movies about the old West like the *Cheyenne Social Club* (1970) and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* have few real counterparts. "Most [prostitutes]… were ignorant, raucous women who died early. Crude abortions, alcoholism and other diseases took an appalling toll. Suicide rates were common place." There was drug addiction, with the expected resultant cases of overdose, and assault by customers. Whether by choice, or good or bad fortune, the girls, often young, rarely continued on in the trade into their thirties. Only a few managed some sort of success and some found husbands (84).

From the bawdy, garish Kate in *Ride the High Country*, to Peggy Lee in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, the many Mexican girls who seem to be always available to satisfy sexually the Kid's gang members in Old Fort Sumner or even the female devotees who surround Mapache and his minions - having escaped from the squalid life in Angel's village - prostitutes populate Peckinpah's films and are often positioned at the receiving end of male violence. One might recall the way Garrett slaps Peggy Lee, trying to elicit from her the Kid's whereabouts. This moment of gratuitous violence, which seems to be downplayed as erotic foreplay, invokes a fantasy scenario whereby Garrett is offered the service of an entourage of prostitutes who bathe him and satisfy his sexual needs. The ethnic variety heightens the fantasy element and underscores the objectification of women. The scene helps bolster the character's ageing anxiety - even hinting at his impotency - and his competition with the Kid but, for all its exuberance and debauchery, it surpasses diegetic needs and can be read as Peckinpah's indulging in a generic variant of the Playboy-philosophy of the time.

The same dynamic whereby women are subject of the male gaze and become object of scopohilic pleasures is dramatized in *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* when Jason Robards's

Hogue first sets eye on Stella Stevens's Hildy. Peckinpah endows the character with a playful gaudiness and liberated sexuality. Like John Ford's Dallas in *Stagecoach*, Hildy is also the outcast victim of the hypocrisy of the town's "decent" folks. In her romantic interlude with the "desert rat" Cable Hogue (Jason Robards), she is treated like a lady because as he says she is: "The damn ladiest lady that has ever been". Although she represents the familiar Western's saloon girl/prostitute, Stella Stevens's character, in her sexual openness, can be inscribed in the more liberated social context of the 60s and 70s. This era seems to have discovered and invested in the "whore with the heart of gold". Shirley MacLaine or Shelley Winters were often cast in this kind of masochist "door-mat" submission.

She is first held by Hogue's gaze as she walks down the street and the close-up on her cleavage, lingering onscreen even after she is out of his sight, emphasizes his subjective point of view, reinforcing her position as the object of male desire. This is further enhanced in their first meeting in her bedroom: her body is fetishized by the close-up on her décolletage, the attention paid to her skimpy attire is comically sustained by the way she reveals an embroidered heart on her panties showing her stitched name in her crotch. These details render her *looked-at-ness* conspicuously and confirm to Mulvey's view that the fetishistic look tends to freeze the narrative. She pleads with him, suggestively protruding her behind as she leans over the bed railing: "Undo me!" Linda Williams argues how female desire and sexual fulfilment is so hard to capture in its visibility and in classical narratives fetishism often operates as a means to mitigate castration anxiety (1999). Hildy's plea is inflected with humour, whereby her "undoing" draws on the male fetishistic gaze and yet, the playfulness of the whole scene, the touch of humor achieved through Hogue's enraptured awkwardness, border on candid naiveté which contrasts with Garrett's sexualized scenario, and his coterie of prostitutes. About the glimpses of her naked rear and her "nipples bobbing above the water" (2004: 228) in the scene where Hildy bathes, Kitses observes:

> The bomb-thrower, the anarchist, the provocateur, Peckinpah clearly relished the use of crude and distancing strategies such as this aggressive indulgence of the male gaze to offend a spectatorship his films often seem to envisage as piously liberal and - in a phrase more recently coined - politically correct. Even in milder comic register, shock tactics were always a favourite strategy of Peckinpah's. In many ways his freest film,

Cable Hogue reveals a director clearly interested in extending his stylistic range and playing with the audience on a variety of levels (229).

34. Stella Stevens as Hildy on display in Peckinpah's *The Ballad of Cable Hogue.*

But the sentimental chivalry in *the Ballad of Cable Hogue* seems to be at odds with other unsettling moments in Peckinpah's work. His last film *The Osterman Weekend* dramatizes the links between voyeurism, female sexuality and violence in a much more disturbing way. The film begins with Fassett (John Hurt) and his wife in bed after love making. As he gets out of bed for a shower, the camera dwells on her naked body and the way she caresses her breasts and starts to masturbate. This moment of privacy is abruptly interrupted when she is murdered by several black-clad hooded figures, entering the room and, holding her

down, they inject her lethally. The script, written by Alan Sharp and based on "a mediocre novel by Robert Ludlum", as argued by Tony Williams (Bliss 2012: 147), offers an insight into the mechanisms of power and manipulation carried out by the media as a tool of political and corporate structures. Above all, Peckinpah critiques television, the medium which launched his career through his Western-TV series phase. As Tony Williams observes apropos of the film's initial striking scene:

> Shot in video imagery resembling a 1970s or 1980s low budget pornographic movie, *The Osterman Weekend*'s opening scenes evoke voyeuristic tendencies that seem to echo Laura Mulvey's classical thesis whereby the male is the bearer of the gaze while the female is the object. Male viewers would supposedly enjoy gazing at a sexual encounter before the brutally sadistic attack on the female body. Such a scene may evoke the familiar charge of "gratuitous violence" usually brought against the director. But what appears initially to be a porno movie soon turns into a snuff film evoking Fassett's later line "Just another episode in this whole snuff opera we're all in" (150).

In a rather *Mulvey-esque* way, Peckinpah gets around to berating society's voyeurism, and the pleasures implied in peeping into private affairs. By shifting the mood of the whole scene he turns a moment of sexual satisfaction into a brutal and unexpected attack. Williams highlights how the video imagery displays a grainy, low-budget aesthetic which colludes with the vicarious pleasures induced by television. Moreover, as in *The Getaway* and *Straw Dogs*, *The Osterman Weekend* is also memorable for its dramatization of marriage under pressure in Peckinpah's *oeuvre*. The view it articulates emphasizes imbalance; the various relationships are perceived as fragile and damaged by years of weary tolerance: whilst Tanner (Rutger Hauer)'s wife, Ali (Meg Foster) is endowed with strength and agency as a bow-and-arrow-wielding warrior, fighting for her survival, their relationship is also marked by disagreement and resentment. The invited couples spending the weekend at the Tanner's villa, who are victims of Fassett's manipulative gaze, expose the wounds in their fractured relations, as represented by the boredom of marital intimacy - a scene where a gum-chewing wife submits to love making out of habit - or by the erotic taunting of disaffected female characters like coke-snorting Virginia (Helen Shaver). Fulwood observes: "And there's plenty of gratuitous nudity. This last is perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of *The Osterman Weekend*, lending credence to those who seek to label

Peckinpah a misogynist" (146). Fulwood, for some reason, picks on gratuitous nudity as the "unfortunate aspect", as if casual and unintentional, forgetting that female nudity had already been more blatantly displayed in *Straw Dogs* or *Alfredo Garcia.* Moreover, recalling the scene with the Russian women in *Cross of Iron* we might wonder whether the gratuitousness of their presence in the narrative is no more than an excuse to bring into focus how men's response to women is, in Peckinpah's world, always shrouded in sexual threat.

Michael Sragow argues that Peckinpah was one of the rare Western directors who could "sympathize with women as deeply as with men" (Bliss 1994: 179), suggesting that many scenes where women are victimized only result from Peckinpah's "democratic" treatment of women and his belief in "gender equality", the same argument which has been wielded by so many critics who seem blind to the objectionable strand of misogyny in Peckinpah's narratives. For Sragow, Ida Lupino's character in *Junior Bonner* is a determined character whose complicit, weary, reaction to her husband's delusional dreams point to her mature acceptance of his flaws and her own disenchantment. As he stresses:

> He (Peckinpah) gave Ida Lupino one of the fullest roles of her career as the mother of Junior Bonner, and there is interplay between her and her estranged husband, Ace (Robert Preston) that says more about male-female relationships (and with the slightest means) than people thought him capable of imagining (1994: 179).

Despite these sympathetic remarks, Peckinpah's women are many a time objectified: Elita's conspicuous nakedness in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* or Fassett's wife masturbating before being brutally killed in *The Osterman Weekend* are strong instances of this. At other times they display the same will and gall as men but they are no more than functional embodiments of a nostalgic West (like Katy Jurado in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*). Recalling Kitses's description of how Peckinpah failed to dramatize the feminine, Peckinpah's misogyny is grounded in a recurrent context where male bonding is construed as essential in defining his vision of manhood. Rape or the threat of it, conflicting heterosexual relations, women's portrayal as wayward beings and the constant brooding over men's travails confirm his discomfort with femininity, echoing his real life "infectious"

relations with the female sex, to use Katherine Haber's words. For those who appreciate his work, and I include myself in this group, his misogyny is so problematic that it is difficult to face it squarely. Gabrielle Murray, the only female critic to write at length about Peckinpah, prefers to dwell on the "intensity, resonance and aesthetic expressiveness of his films" (5) although she recognizes that his "sometimes aberrant treatment of the representation of women and his excessive use of violence was noted and condemned" (5). Murray does not go further in exploring what she calls "aberrant treatment" of women and concentrates on Peckinpah's rendition of the "paradoxical nature of the human condition" (7), emphasizing the lyricism and life-affirming rituals that underlie his work.

Peckinpah's misogyny reflects the instability of his fiery personality, which fed mostly on conflict, the haunting feeling of betrayal caused by his difficult relation with his mother and his progressive lapses into emotional chaos brought on by alcohol and drug abuse. Both David Weddle and Marshall Fine wrote extensively about the pathological relations he established with his different wives and lovers and his constant need to assert "a macho posturing" (Weddle 1996: 37) inculcated in his childhood by the strong influence of his grandfather and father.

The following sections will explore two films in which misogyny is a central strand. The fact that *The Getaway* will be explored first, although it was released one year after *Straw Dogs*, can be explained by the controversy around the latter film and the fact that it was the furthest Peckinpah took his dealings with problematic sexual relations. Suffice it to say, both dwell on masculine anxiety and the threat that women pose to men's phallic power, rendering fragile their authority and agency. As Peter Lehman observes: "The important point is precisely that all penises are inadequate to the phallus, that none of them can measure up to it" (1993: 10). This angst-ridden, recessive recognition seems to lie at the heart of both *The Getaway* and *Straw Dogs*, two compelling but flawed films.

i- Misogyny in *The Getaway*: masculinity under trial

"You'd do the same for me, wouldn't you Doc?"
Carol McCoy (Ali MacGraw) in *The Getaway* (1972)

The Getaway was Peckinpah's most successful film at the box office.[54] After the understated *Junior Bonner*, which did not feature Peckinpah's hallmark violent sequences, Peckinpah directed this successful action film which allowed him to have some freedom in choosing subsequent projects. As Neil Fulwood observed:

> For the first time in his career, Peckinpah undertook to direct a formulaic action film in good heart, reminding his cast and crew that while they weren't creating a work of art, they would still deliver a professional finished product (88).

The finished product reveals Peckinpah's mastery of montage, as borne out by the careful action pieces and the slow motion technique; the film is more interesting in Peckinpah's work, however, for what it discloses about his vision of women and their relevance (or irrelevance) in the narrative. Like *Guncrazy* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1950) *Thieves like Us* (Robert Altman, 1974*)* or *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Getaway* centers around a couple on the run after their involvement in a bank robbery; and yet, despite the escape motif, and the action-fuelled moments, the film offers a complex portrait of heterosexual relations. I would argue that *The Getaway* centers on a construction of manhood which has been endangered by repressive forces, like the prison system, and by its surrender to women, who reveal themselves as a powerful emasculating menace. The film's initial sequence is remarkable in the editing style it displays since it intersperses images of Doc (Steve McQueen)'s sense of entrapment, the stultifying, repetitive work with the power loom, the unremitting noise of the jail machine shop, and the Panoptic-like surveillance apparatus of prison. His recollections of Carol (Ali MacGraw), the longed-for freedom he is not allowed to enjoy,

[54] David Weddle writes: "*The Wild Bunch* had taken him to the top of his profession artistically; *The Getaway* took him there commercially. Now he was a bankable name. His signature on a contract, like McQueen's and those of a handful of other Hollywood talents, was enough to guarantee the financing of a picture " (1996:443).

are heightened by visions of a natural landscape existing outside the prison gates, as shown by the image of grazing deer which can be glimpsed over the barbed-wired fences. Doc's sullen demeanor, the controlled rage he displays while managing the jail machines, project the unsettling effect his imprisonment exerts on his mental state. This carefully constructed set-piece, which reflects Doc's subjectivity, culminates in his act of despair as he knocks down and crushes a matchstick bridge, the product of his idle hours and painstaking patience. When his parole request is denied, he asks Carol to go to Benyon (Ben Johnson), a corrupt oilman-cum-politician and member of the parole board who has the power to engineer his release. "Tell him I'm for sale, his price". Not knowing that Benyon's price would include Carol's body, Doc offers his professional expertise to pull off a bank robbery. While the film dwells on the heist that goes awry, it also digresses from this central plot to explore the idea of trust and betrayal and the way Doc regains his masculine integrity through a long process of healing. Carol's shooting of Benyon and her confession that she had whored herself to him to get Doc's release ignites the latter's insecurity and sets off the couple's progressive estrangement. If Doc's anxiety had already been revealed when they first meet after his four-year incarceration, as proven by his question "Did you get out much?" her reticence, and her acknowledgment that four years is a long time, is tempered by her reassuring "I'm still here". Doc is incapable of articulating his experience of prison as hinted at by his hardly voiced, stifled pain: "It does something to you", repeated three times, the third one with the coda "in there". When he thanks her for getting him out, her double-edged answer "It was my pleasure" gains an ironic resonance later on. Peckinpah also suggests Doc's insecurity in their first sexual reencounter; Carol's coaxes him into restoring their long-lost intimacy, suggesting that she is prepared to wait, guessing his anxiety over performance.

Doc's brutal reaction to Carol's unfaithfulness constitutes a turning point in the narrative and disturbingly sets the stage for a violent attack that evokes the misogynistic scenario of domestic violence. Unable to control his rage, he pulls over the car and slaps her several times on the face, topping it off with a disparaging "stupid". Carol's sacrifice mars the couple's relationship, initiating Doc's estrangement and his inability to deal with what he regards as an unforgivable betrayal. However, by asking him "You would do the same for

me, wouldn't you Doc? If I got caught?" Carol demands he show the same wholeheartedly generosity, insisting on her own equal agency, and questioning the speciousness of his wounded masculine pride. About this wife-battering scene, Stephen Tatum argues that Doc had heretofore undergone a process of emasculation through his own imprisonment and had been humiliated by drudgery, emphasized in the initial sequence. Accordingly, "contemplating the specter of a woman who has traded places with a man and who has occupied the "active position" (2003: 184) bruises his masculine pride. This emasculation is made more painfully acute through Carol's sexual surrender to a politically influential man.

Carol, like Amy in *Straw Dogs*, unsettles patriarchal order by "misbehaving", crossing the boundaries which phallocentric power had assigned her. As Linda Ruth Williams argues apropos of Amy, she epitomizes the in-between in a world where men fight for territorial control, the image of "a wayward will in a body which men can only "lick" (as is once said in the film), possessed by an obdurate inability to behave as she ought" (1995: 26). For these reasons, not only in *Straw Dogs* but also in *The Getaway*, "femininity remains a problem, an irresolute and difficult form of unpredictability" (26). It is for this reason that Doc begrudgingly states: "I think you liked it better with him, I think he got to you", giving away his own sexual insecurity regarding the older, more powerful man. This also shows how Doc voices Peckinpah's inability to understand, or even to try to understand, women and their emotional commitments that go beyond sex and orgasms.

Stephen Tatum observes how the narrative tends to foreground Doc (McQueen)'s body as an object of visual pleasure, epitomizing a narcissistic projection of power and control. *The Getaway* also capitalizes on the visual appeal of a man who seems to be at ease with his own corporeality, moving swiftly either as shotgun-bearing or pistol-toting hero, able to get the drop on his enemies, both the reckless Rudy (Al Lettieri) or Benyon's hoodlums. Bringing into focus McQueen's self-possessed screen presence, Tatum observes: "This look, this coiled athletic walk and an overall reticence with language constitute McQueen's hyperphallicized presence on the screen" (177). One just has to recall the scene where Doc retrieved the stolen suitcase by elbow-jabbing the conman that had tricked Carol into giving him the key to her locker and thus stealing the loot. Doc's controlled demeanour as he

manages to chase down the man without a sign of nervousness or discomfiture recalls the Bunch's professional composure at stealing the ammunition cases from a moving train. In this sense, Tatum avers how Peckinpah's image of phallic masculinity mobilizes psychic mechanisms of voyeurism, fetishism and narcissistic identification with a star who stands for composure and control. However, McQueen's strong persona[55] is at odds with the insecurity that the narrative seeks to explore, as stemming from Carol's unfaithfulness. This constitutes a contradiction which lies disturbingly at the heart of the narrative: how can McQueen's assurance and physical attractiveness accommodate the anxiety he must also register caused by betrayal? In other words, McQueen's screen image does not fit well with the image of the cuckolded husband - contrasting with Dustin Hoffman's David in *Straw Dogs* -, a conundrum that the narrative resolves to some extent by paralleling this relationship with that of Rudy and Fran.

Against Doc's image of self-sufficiency, women are construed as a threat, a constant reminder of men's precarious hold on power. Interestingly, Carol is set against Fran (Sally Struthers), the vet's wife who falls in with Rudy's sexual demands, seduced by a fantasy of male domination as evinced by her enthralled fondling of his gun. Fran regresses to a teenage-like irresponsibility, being reduced to a "stupid broad" (as she is called by one of Benyon's thugs) and accepting her objectification at the hands of a brute. If Carol seems to project a kind of cool, controlled demeanor that matches Doc's sleek bearing, Fran embodies an imbecilic submissiveness which is demeaning even by Peckinpah's standards. Whilst her collusion with Rudy's demands and her sexual objectification can be read as a masochistic attempt to flee a stultifying marriage with Harold (Jack Dodson), her unfaithfulness can also be read as a crude distortion of Carol's transgression. In this sense, Tatum states:

> This narrative and its accompanying secret center on how women such as Carol McCoy (and later Fran Clinton) dangerously and somewhat unpredictably change alliances, circulate across various legal and social borders, and in effect put masculine authority in crisis. The possibility of proving and (re) establishing normative masculine authority, much less achieving a "clean" narrative getaway, whether from Huntsville

[55] Garner Simmons observes: "Steve McQueen had an electrifying screen presence that placed him among the top-grossing box-office personalities in motion pictures for over a decade" (1998: 161).

> or Beacon City, thus depends at bottom on the access to and control of women, both their bodies and their possessions (184).

The Getaway thus displaces onto a parallel narrative the unsavory, masochistic aspects which are at odds with McQueen's phallicized, unassailable image and with McGraw's elegance.

35. Fran holding Rudy's phallic gun and enjoying herself, seduced by the thrill of action, while her humiliated husband is tied to a chair and forced to witness their sexual interplay.

Michael Bliss also lays stress on the parallelism established at certain moments in the narrative which pits the two couples against each other. He states:

> At one point, Rudy is listening to a radio in a motel room while Doc goes into a store to buy a radio; another coincidence occurs there, since just as Doc walks into the store, a television announcer reports about him while a picture of Doc flashes onto the screen. Rudy and Fran have a good fight in Harold's car at the same time that Doc and Carol pull into a drive-in, where another regrettable dovetailing occurs. The radio in Doc's and Carol's car is broadcasting a news story about them. Doc turns off the radio and places his order, the carhop leaves, and Doc turns the radio back to some

> music. At this point, Peckinpah cuts to Rudy's motel room, where Fran is listening to the same station (Bliss 1993: 210).

Tatum sees the film's obsession with images of soiling and cleaning as coterminous with its attempt to purge Doc's image of corruptive forces: the prison system with its dehumanizing forms of submission and surveillance, Benyon's skullduggery and Carol's troubling revelation. Accordingly, the film posits "masculinity in crisis and under siege" (175). Moreover, Tatum emphasizes how the visual prominence of "shattered glass and chrome, and wood and plastic" (180) as well as the pervasive machine gun shootings and explosions indicate the film's destabilization of "normative authority" (180) through Doc's "magical ability to shape material objects to his need" (180). Calling to mind Sally Robinson's theorization on narratives of blockage and release, it can be argued that Doc's release of energy through violence is meant to unleash the pent-up masculine power which he had been forced to block - and this can be translated into the mayhem he causes, as his energies are allowed to "flow" again unconstrained and into how his marriage is repaired by shared adventure.

Thus, *The Getaway* has recurrent images of cleaning where characters shower, immerse themselves in water - as in the lake scene when Doc gets out of prison - or even, through Harold's suicide-attempt, to escape from visually degrading predicaments. Benyon is a defiling patriarchal entity who needs to be destroyed to make way for Doc's regaining of his confidence and cool authority. In this regard, Doc is pitted against the brutish, sexist Rudy whose violent demeanour borders on the psychotic.The gun that Fran caresses hints at a hyper-masculinity which is undesirable in its inflection by violence. In his analysis of *Unforgiven* and *A Perfect World,* Lehman observes:

> Both *Unforgiven* and *A Perfect World*, however, reveal a 1990s continuing preoccupation with the importance of penis size and the undesirability of small ones, as well as offering a new caution against the usual reification of the "big dick" as the desired alternative. On the contrary, these films seem to desire a concept of normality in which either extreme is dangerous. As such their insistence on the importance of the "normal penis" is much like their insistence on normal forms of masculinity (1998: 136).

Both films posit penis size as central to a reification of a good or bad masculinity. By the same token, in *Unforgiven*, the "Two Gun Corky" story which Little Bill narrates to the eager W.W. Beauchamp (Saul Rubinek), points to the idea that an enlarged penis - as excessive potency - can be an obstruction to effective gun mastery. In *A Perfect World*, Kevin Costner's Haynes who plays a surrogate father to the child he abducts, reassures him that his penis is just the perfect size for his age. With this in mind, I would argue that, set against Rudy's abusive behavior, Doc's masculinity is reassuring, a desirable normality. Lehman argues that the mystique surrounding the penis, demands that it be hidden from view, in such a way that power and authority can never be questioned. By contrast, Rudy's monstruous pistol, which excites Fran's admiration, tends to collapse the distinction between the penis and the phallus and hence to deflate the "mystique" implied in its necessary understatement as his "gun" is too conspicuously displayed.

Unlike other Peckinpah heroes, Doc is not physically impaired. He is close to Steiner in his taciturn demeanour and like him his composure emanates a sense of decency which, in an amoral world, marks his singularity and superiority. If women may be threatening, he is even more menaced by a corporate system which morphs into literal and metaphorical garbage and debris. Evoking the bulldozers of *Junior Bonner,* which voraciously seem to gobble up the past, serving a new capitalist structure that bolsters the new economic premises by which the characters have to abide, the foregrounding of the dump and the rubbish pile in *The Getaway* - as well as the shipyard in *The Killer Elite* - suggests an implicit connection between capitalism and waste, corruption and junk.

Doc will relinquish his distrust of Carol only after their being swallowed and spewed up again by a garbage truck where they seek a hide-out in their attempt to escape from the police. Until then the only thing he trusts, as he tells a distressed Carol, is the inscription "In God we trust" printed on a dollar bill. The following exchange is suggestive of the purgation their relation has to undergo:

Carol: "I can screw all the parole officers in Texas if I want to".
Doc: "Texas is a big state".

Carol “I can handle it”.

Doc: “Yeah I bet you could”.

Therefore, infidelity imposes a barrier of suspicion and distrust which entwines with the feeling of emasculation and lack of control that the prison system had imposed and that the first set-pieces so suggestively presented. *The Getaway* offers a beguiling version of masculine and feminine representations, where misogyny surfaces in nasty moments of violence and humiliation. When, after throwing pork ribs at both Fran and her hapless husband Harold - in a scene which starts in playfulness and ends in a bout of fierce aggression - Rudy asks if she knew why he did that, telling her “because it makes me feel good”, pointing to the gratuitous nature of his brutality ingrained in misogyny. He demands that she remove her red nail polish and pulls the straps of her bra, revealing the aggressive behavior that is the expression of his brutish control. Despite this, as Robin Wood so appositely suggests, Peckinpah is unable to let go of Al Lettieri’s Rudy Butler and his savage masculinity:

> One doesn’t know whether to blame actress, director or both for the entirely bland and uninteresting performance of Ali McGraw in *The Getaway* but it seems significant that the Peckinpah film in which the man-woman relationship is most central - both structurally and in terms of values - should have a yawning gap where the heart should be. The same fascination with “maleness” also accounts for Peckinpah’s inability to detach himself from the brutish and repulsive Rudy Butler in the same film: the presentation of his pathetic, humiliated victim’s suicide as *funny* is in all Peckinpah’s work to date the moment that is hardest to forgive (1980: 74).

Neil Fulwood observes how the film is a Western disguised as an action film. He states:

> Peckinpah uses the material to comment on his favorite theme: men out of their time - the onset or onslaught of modernity. In this respect *The Getaway* is definitely a western brought into the second half of the twentieth century. The iconography spells it out for even the most sub-textually-challenged viewer: Benyon’s men, the con-artists at the station and the old timer that helps Doc and Carol to cross the border all wear cowboy hats: Benyon’s office is decorated with bullhorns (92-93).

This can be borne out not only by the characters' attire but also by the casting of Ben Johnson[56], one of the most prominent members of Peckinpah's stock company (and also evoking Ford's Westerns in which he had played several roles) and that of Bo Hopkins as Frank Jackson, who as Fulwood remarks brings back Crazy Lee "dusted off and given a 1970s haircut" (96). However, although Fulwood's arguments established some similarities between both genres, they are more based on the role of stars and iconographic details - like cowboy hats - rather than on the gender issues that *The Getaway* explores. In fact, jealousy, male insecurity and unfaithfulness are not generally considered central elements in the generic premises of the Western.

It becomes significant then that Doc's recovery of trust and renewed belief is visually enhanced by the couple's crossing the border into Mexico, aided by an avuncular, good-ole-boy cowboy, played by Slim Pickens. "Are you guys married?" he asks and happy with their acquiescence, he muses over the "problem with this goddamn world" which lies in its lack of morals. That the film offers with this ironic side-note a comment on the corruption that Doc and Carol have sought to leave behind does not completely efface how contrived a happy ending it appears to be. The healing of their marriage required a renegotiation of power implying the destruction of the "bad couple", represented by Rudy and Fran. And yet, the misogynistic view of women lingers on through a narrative that overlays its action sequences with the need to heal a wounded masculinity and trace its therapeutic regaining of authority. Even so, unlike Steiner in *Cross of Iron* or Mike in *The Killer Elite*, who abandon their female companions for the sake of male bonding, *The Getaway* places the dynamics of the heterosexual couple at the heart of its narrative, exploring to the full what his other films largely dismiss. And quite often, what we see is far from pleasant.

[56] In *The Last Picture Show (*Peter Bogdanovich, 1971) he plays an old cowboy, Sam the Lion, who represents a fading way of life in a stultifying Western town. His death and the pain it brings on in many of the characters that surround him projects the vanishing of the old West and the transition into a new refashioned social world which is defined by loss as perceived by the characters' loneliness and lack of existential goals.

36. Doc (Steve McQueen) slapping Carol (Ali MacGraw) in *The Getaway*

37. Doc embracing Carol in *The Getaway*

ii- Misogyny in *Straw Dogs*: masculinity under siege

"Every chair is my daddy's chair"
Amy (Susan George) in *Straw Dogs* (1971)

Based on the short novel *The Siege of Trencher's Farm*, by Gordon M. Williams, *Straw Dogs* is perhaps only surpassed by *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974), in its bitter portrayal of the human proclivity for violence, as Peckinpah's darkest films. The title itself, *Straw Dogs,* bears no resemblance to that of the novel on which it was based. It is explained thus by Weddle:

> Peckinpah came up with a new title based on an enigmatic passage from *The Book of 5000 Characters* by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu: "Heaven and Earth are ruthless and treat the myriad of creatures as straw dogs: the sage is ruthless and treats the people as straw dogs. Is not the space between Heaven and Earth like a bellows?" Peckinpah explained in a memo to Baum: "In the Tien Yun in the Chuang Tzu it is said that straw dogs were treated with greatest deference before they were used as an offering, only to be discarded and trampled upon as soon as they served their purpose. The studio head couldn't make head nor tail of this Chinese mumbo-jumbo, but the new title had an intriguing ring to it and he approved it (1995: 23).

At the time of its release, it drew down upon itself massive controversy. Pauline Kael accused Peckinpah of giving full vent to a fascist representation of manhood, while Joan Mellen reviled the film's deploying of vigilante violence to restore a besieged masculinity. As Stephen Prince argues, quoting these two critics, Kael concluded that the film was "Neanderthal" whereas Joan Mellen "believed that the film says that only violence against other men can prepare a male to be a lover skillful enough to satisfy a sexually alive woman" (126).

I would contend, however that *Straw Dogs* traces the disintegration of a marriage and muses over the insurmountable differences between men and women, their differences surfacing in the midst of an escalating journey into violence. In fact, it can be argued that the film is the purest distillation of Peckinpah's troubled vision of heterosexual relations, where passion is synonymous with conflict. Bearing in mind his troubled home life (see Weddle: 1996; Fine: 1991), *Straw Dogs* can be said to project his own personal misgivings

regarding heterosexual commitments and the possibility of enduring love. Moreover, through the representation of opposing male images, *Straw Dogs* offers a disquieting reflection on the legitimacy of violence in a hostile environment, reasserting in the darkest possible manner the necessity of both social and sexual self-affirmation.

Seeking a quiet place to devote time to his academic studies, David Sumner (Dustin Hoffman), an American mathematician and his English wife Amy (Susan George) return to the Cornish village where she was brought up and where they aim to live in the secluded country house she has inherited from her father. The opening images of the film point to the couple's glamour as contrasted with the village's constricting, staid milieu. The local children who play in a graveyard look leeringly and curiously as Amy and David stroll along the road followed by Janice Hedden (Sally Thomsett), the sexually precocious teenager who is attracted to the couple's youth and David's cultural difference. The first shot we get of Amy is of her braless breasts protruding within her woolen jumper. By positing right from the outset Amy's tangible sexual attractiveness, turning her into an object of scopic pleasure, Peckinpah foregrounds her unsettling effect on the scenario of her native village. As Michael Sragow states "she's putting herself on parade, not merely as a sexual object but also as a small town girl made good" (Bliss 2012: 73). Significantly, she has just bought a man trap, an antique for her collection. Simultaneously, David's human figure seems diminished when pitted against the thuggish village types epitomized by Amy's former boyfriend Charles Venner (Del Henney).

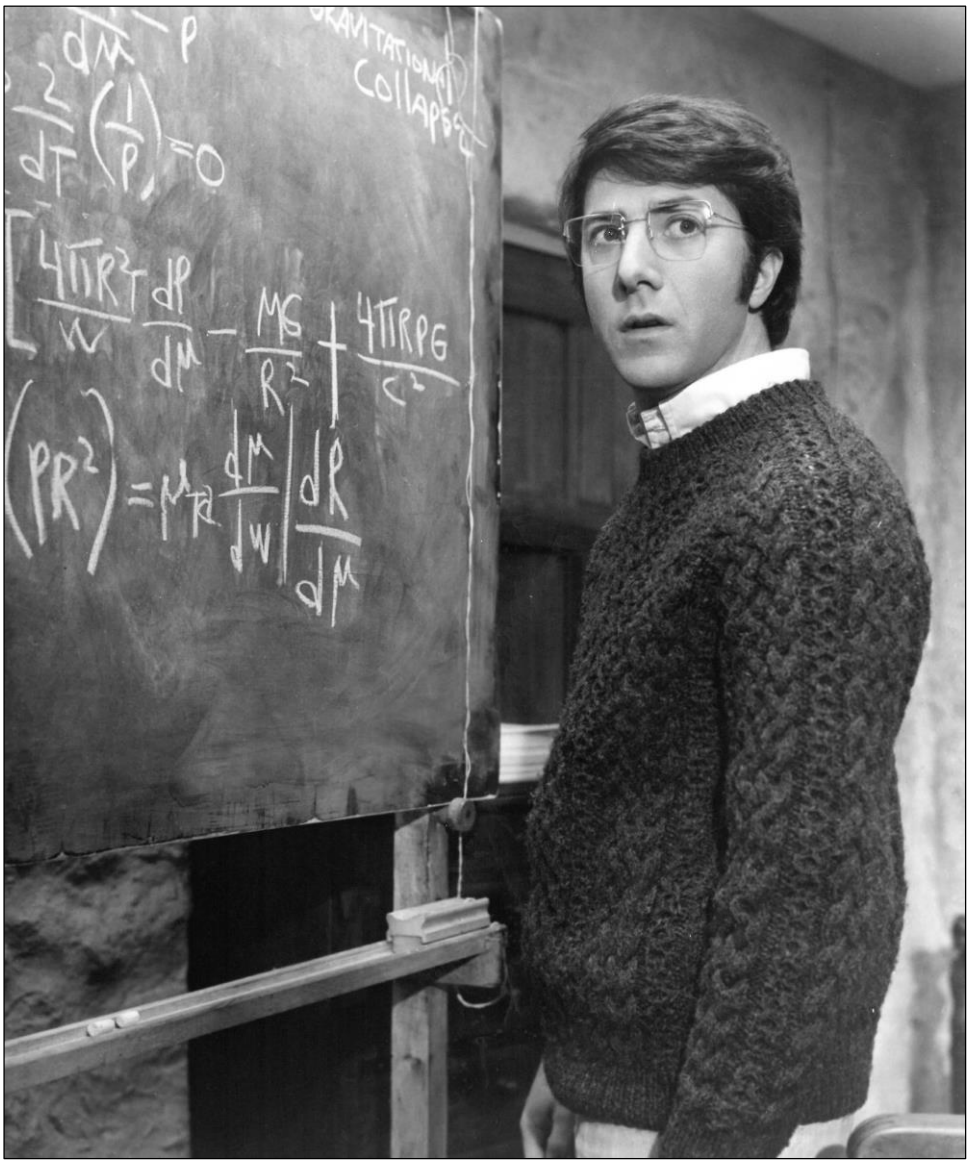
The bespectacled Dustin Hoffman is an American intellectual who seems displaced in a village where brawn supersedes rationality. Interestingly, David cannot fall back on any male bunch which featured in other Peckinpah films, offering solace and reassurance to his characters. He has thus to rely on his wife and that will prove problematic. David's "aloness" becomes relevant here evincing his exclusion. His displacement is nowhere more suggestive than at the moment he enters the pub to buy any "kind of American cigarettes", his request already positioning him as an outsider: the camera lingers on his short stature, capturing in a low angle shot his discomfited figure. Neil Fulwood argues that Peckinpah

transposed Western imagery to the Cornish village where the pub represents the saloon, echoing the genre's scenarios of brawling, fast drawing and one-upmanship. Fulwood argues: "*Straw dogs* is the first of the contemporary Westerns, David Sumner is the first loner to appear in Peckinpah's world" (77). Here Fulwood seems to forget other loners in Peckinpah's *oeuvre*, like Cable Hogue or even Junior Bonner, who insist on getting down "their own road". The scene might recall Shane's memorable entrance of the saloon, asking for a soda and being subject to ridicule. However, whereas Shane is never stripped of his self-assurance, David's awkwardness signals his sense of inadequacy. Moreover, his bookish demeanor is visually reflected in his glasses, woolen jumpers and loafers, constantly played off against the villagers' menacing physicality. If the return to Amy's village seems to represent the hope of an auspicious beginning and a safe haven for the couple's marriage, it soon appears that their relationship is already seriously damaged. David staves off Amy's attempts at emotional contact and regards her efforts as interruptions hampering his work. She exacts revenge for his constant rebukes by indulging in petty retribution, such as when she changes one of his plus signs in his equation to a minus or when she glues gum on his blackboard, topping it off with an angrily-drawn chalk line over his calculations. David's condescending view of Amy's intellect is clearly perceived when, as she attempts to explain the logic of binary numbers, he remarks in an encouraging tone but betraying his sense of superiority "See, you're not so dumb after all". Linda Ruth Williams writes in *Sight and Sound*:

> She is the coquettish child who married her teacher, and though it is not explicitly stated, David, the college professor is positioned in *loco parentis* to Amy the nubile student: not so very unusual in itself perhaps, but here pushed to the point of aberration (as is so much in this film) (1995: 27).

David Weddle confirms this view in the same journal:

> The young professor, David Sumner, tries to contain the relationship emotionally. To keep it within a safe compartment that will fit neatly into his labelled and filed life. Yet, subconsciously he senses the shallowness of his marriage and resents it, even though he is the one who set it up. Again and again he sticks blades of sarcasm into Amy, subtly ridiculing her for her lack of intellect (1995: 22).



38. David realizing that Amy has messed up his equation.

Weddle's description of David as someone who strives to keep everything safely compartmentalized in "his labelled and filed life", is borne out in the scene where, before getting into bed, and prior to love making, he skips rope, takes off his watch and sets the alarm clock even after Amy is already aroused and trying to embrace him. The need to organize everything and to follow ritualized procedures hints at the boredom underlying their intimacy and his inadequacy as a lover. In Terence Butler's words: "Their sex life appears to be one long arousal without orgasm" (71).

39. Amy, before showering, defiantly flaunts her nakedness to the native yokels.

The reason why David and Amy are a couple seems bewildering,[57] their differences being deep and manifest. Peckinpah makes us aware of this chasm by foregrounding the way Amy and David indulge in regressive childish behavior. The way she sits with her feet up on the chair, chewing gum and taunting him like a young girl seems to set off a sexual ritual which places him in a parental role. Moreover, when he asks her if she is sitting on her daddy's chair, she replies defiantly "every chair is my daddy's chair". This suggests Amy's emotional bond with an absent domineering patriarch, for whom Sumner's weaker, impaired masculinity is no match, as evidenced by his inability to hammer a nail or fix a toaster. Moreover, the idea that David sought refuge in Amy's native village to devote time to his studies is exposed as a ruse, as his true motives lie in his attempt to escape the social unrest buffeting American society at the time, according to Amy. His inability to "take a

[57] Suggestively Michael Sragow underscores this idea: "This couple is made of opposites in every way: he's far sighted but Amy needs reading glasses" (Bliss 2012: 73).

stand, to commit" are construed as an indictment of his own weakness. When asked by the locals he has hired to fix the garage roof if he has seen "anybody being killed", Sumner replies "only between commercials". This relocates the long-standing Western trope whereby the softness of the Easterner is set against the physical strength, the capacity to act and the display of self-control of the Westerner. Intellectuality is rarely cast in a positive light in American cinema; this trait often precludes the ability to take a physical stand. The constant disparagement and derision of David's otherness by the boisterous all-male group of builders is inflected by a horror-genre-derived threat, throwing into question David's control over his physical and emotional space, imperiled by the yokels.[58] The latters' protracted neglect of the task they should be carrying out renders David's authority increasingly fragile. The dangers of these invasions into the couple's private space culminate in the killing of Amy's cat,[59] which intensifies her revulsion at David's gutlessness and unleashes his subsequent self-loathing and his engagement in alienating violence. Peckinpah portrays, through David's self-driven isolation ("I love you Amy but I want you to leave me alone", he says at one point in the narrative) - a fractured self whose only pathway to wholeness is through violent self-affirmation.

The notorious rape scene is destabilizing not only for its violence but also for the questions it has raised regarding Amy as a victim. Amy's subjective perception of her attackers is intercut with images of David through an unsettling montage that posits both husband and rapists as possessing the same proclivity for aggressive behavior. While agreeing to go on a hunting trip with the labourers, led by Venner and Scutt (Ken Hutchison), David is duped and left on the moor by the men with whom he has desperately striven to ingratiate himself. Venner returns to Amy's place and when she lets him in, he begins his physical assault. The ambiguity of the scene is what has made it so controversial, garnering from critics and viewers a stream of outrage. Thus, while cringing at Venner's touch at the beginning of his attack, Amy seems to forsake her resistance, giving in to a mixture of pain

[58] Anthony Barker in his article "Survivalist Violence of the American Cinema of the early 1970s" highlights how the horror quality of the film is similar to that achieved in Romero's *The Night of the Living Dead*.
[59] Interestingly, both Fran, in *The Getaway*, and Amy in *Straw Dogs* are aligned with cats evoking both commonly held biased ideas about cats' disloyal nature and Peckinpah's own words about women as "pussy".

and sexual pleasure, thus pandering to the male fantasy in which women really "want it rough". This recalls a previous scene where David, after hearing Amy's complaints that Venner and Scutt were practically "licking her body", remarks that her "walking around without a bra" is inviting that kind of salacious stare, giving credence to the idea that women are often really "asking for it". Stephen Prince in his reading of the scene underlines how Amy's acquiescence can be put down to her former relationship with Venner: the fact that he was her boyfriend in the past seems to provide some sort of justification for her surrender to the sexual act and even for her climax into orgasm, as Peckinpah unabashedly suggests by focusing on Amy's facial expression. Her muffled, compliant admonition "easy" seems to downplay the crudity of rape and subversively undermines the attribution to Amy of the victim role. In fact, as Anthony Barker points out "The encouragement was indeed so controversial that the British censor insisted on adding more violence to the rape to confirm it was indeed a rape" (2013: 24). Moreover, David Weddle stresses how Susan George was distraught by the fierce intensity and ambivalence of the scene ("I dreaded that rape scene" said George, as quoted by Weddle 1996: 421), even considering walking off the picture.

The moment Norman Scutt, the second rapist, enters the scene and Venner viciously holds Amy down so that his associate might sodomize her steps up a gear in violence, absent from the first sequence with Venner. Peckinpah intercuts the scene with shots of David, alone in the woods, wielding a loaded gun that seems heavier than himself, a mocking phallic reminder of his cuckolded condition and his inability to defend his own home and wife. Prince argues that Amy's traumatic memories of rape are clearly played out in the church social gathering, to which she and David are later invited. As he mentions: "The rape has altered Amy's relationship with her village and its denizens, whose presence for her is now unwelcome, oppressive and fraught with tension" (85). In fact, Peckinpah, through careful montage, focuses on Amy's painful facial expression, as she bears the presence of her attackers. This is clearly perceived from the way Peckinpah explores Amy's subjective point of view, intercutting in disjointed, jolting frames memories of her sexual abuse,

painfully set off by the grotesquerie of the children's grating, and suggestive whistles, the gang's sniggering remarks and the laughing audience.

Janice's death at the hands of the village idiot, Henry Niles (David Wraner),[60] who inadvertently breaks her neck, sets off the final confrontation between David and the all-male gang, led by Tom Hedden (Janice's father) and the labourers including the two rapists Venner and Scutt. The violence of Janice's killing is downplayed by Niles's mental derangement, making the act perversely "innocent" in that it results from the simpleton's inability to control his instincts. Mullaney's study on women's batterers emphasizes how aggressors tend to deny responsibility "since the batterer believes the source of the real problem to be external to him entirely" (2007: 224). Based on studies that involved interviewing aggressors, she also concludes that "quasi-repudiations reframe violence as somehow not violence through various means, including, but not limited to, not knowing about violence due to instances of 'blacking out', minimizing the violence (e.g calling a ten-minute rampage a 'little accident'), or narrowing the scope of what should count as violence in the first place" (225).

After accidently hitting the runaway Niles with his car, due to the fog, David decides to take him home and refuses to hand him over to the enraged villagers. His strength here contrasts with the weakened, emasculated image he had heretofore embodied, his anger resulting in a display of survivalist instinct. Apropos of this final showdown, Barker argues that *Straw Dogs* is inscribed in an emergent line of 70s films which applaud the resurgence of male survivalist energies, albeit bringing to the fore the psychic havoc such violence wreaks and the heavy toll it takes on the masculine ethos of indomitability. Thus, one may recall *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972) where a group of city dwellers are threatened by a group of hillbilly degenerates. Like the characters in *Deliverance*, David has to tap into his hitherto unknown capabilities to defend himself and his property against the thugs. When asked by the latter why he tries to protect Niles, he replies "because he is my

[60] Peckinpah always displayed a special fondness for what David Weddle calls "child-men". As the author mentions: "They appear again and again unable to comprehend or fit into the complex and corrupt world that surrounds them, yet they themselves also carry the demon seed of violence" (Weddle 1996: 67).

responsibility". However, Peckinpah clearly shows the character's confusion by offering a close-up of his baffled face as he desperately seeks a rationale for his action. Similarly, when Amy insists on his handing over Niles to the attackers, he accuses her of callous indifference, while he is the one who really cares about defending "his house", forgetting the fact that it is her and her father's house. David's choice of Niles as a protégé seems quite arbitrary and stems mainly from his need to vindicate his authority and compensate for the feeling of humiliation he has suffered.

40. David trying to calm down Niles (David Warner) whose panic leads him to attack Amy.

What follows is a maelstrom of violence where Sumner's gumption and calculation gain the upper hand in opposition to the locals' makeshift brutality. This long sequence marries a horror-genre sense of imperilment with an almost *carnivalesque* disruption of normality. The men's sexual menace (so disturbingly realized in Caxton's mocking snigger and his outrageous rats) signal the film's inscription in the ultraviolent *Peckinpahesque* mode. Throughout the battle, the rift between David and his wife becomes sharper, she considers

shifting sides. He grabs her by the hair, justifying to some extent previous subjective shots where he was aligned with Amy's aggressors. The climax is reached when he manages to kill Venner with the man trap, delivering an agonizing death which restores his wounded pride. The draining battle can be construed as no more than a pretext to prove his wife wrong. Sragow observes:

> During the siege, the action within the house is every bit as fraught with uncertainty as the action outside the house. Peckinpah takes nerve-wracking care in calibrating the relative drunkenness, giddiness, and shock of the gang who can't think on their feet, as well as the quickening responsiveness of David, *who is fighting not for his manhood but for survival*. Amy is the wild card in the conflict not because she's a woman but because David and Venner have tested and broken her affections. When David slaps her and grabs her by the hair to keep her from joining Venner, his actions swing jarringly close to those of the rapists (Bliss 2012: 78). (my italics)

What Sragow rejects is that David's deployment of violence is rooted in his need to restore his beleaguered masculinity. His insistence on protecting Niles contradicts Amy's plea to hand him over to the angry mob and, through that intransigence, he reinforces his authority over her. His baffled recognition that he has"got them all", evidenced by his final bemused look at the mayhem he had unleashed, hints at his own newly found discovery of the cleansing power of violence.

If the film seems to legitimize violence, in the trope of the worm turning, the former victim Sumner taking revenge on the thugs who had humiliated him in such an unremitting way, it also considers the dangers of a frontier-style vigilante justice. Sumner's "rebirth" at the end is sullied by a sense of psychic alienation, a Travis Bickle-like unanchored loneliness, eventually cut adrift from any sense of ontological safety. When he leaves his wife behind, getting into the car with Niles who pathetically remarks "I don't know my way home" David replies "That's okay, I don't either". Amy's image, sitting on the steps of the stairs, worn out, distressed, and utterly crushed, lingers on disturbingly. After all she was throughout the narrative trampled over, humiliated, sexually abused and ignored. David's last words to her "Are you all right?" and her trembling acquiescent nod convey her shock and the depth of her desolated loneliness. Andrea Dworkin's words acquire a special significance here:

> In all their communication, shouted and whispered, no matter what men have done to them, *they name women the threat, and the truth is that any loyalty to women does threaten a man's place in the community of men*. *Anything, including memory or conscience that pulls a man toward women as humans not as objects and not as monsters, does endanger him. But the danger is always from other men. And no matter how afraid he is of those other men, he has taken a vow - one for all and all for one - and he will not tell.* Women are scapegoated here too, called powerful by men who know too well how powerless women are - know it so well that they will tell any lie and omit any crimes so as not to be touched by the stigma of that powerlessness (66). (my italics)

The idea of any overriding victory is belied by David's alignment with a man who is in fact a woman-killer, albeit mentally unfit. There is no sense of glory in this drive to nowhere but a melancholia which suggests David's painful "rebirth" into a new man, one who has become aware that the hegemonic model of masculinity is perversely aligned with a capacity for violent action. After all, if he looks through the rearview mirror, he might see a version of Martin Scorsese, in his cameo appearance, as the misogynistic devil passenger in *Taxi Driver* (1976) who asks Travis (Robert De Niro) if he ever saw what a .44 Magnum pistol can do to a woman's pussy. "You don't have to answer", he says, but Travis, like his disturbed forbear David Sumner, silently muses over it.

IX- Conclusion

"Don't let anyone kid you. It's bloody murder learning how to direct".
Sam Peckinpah in an interview with John Cutts, 1969 (Hayes: 55)

Conclusions are not easy to draw from a career as short and intensely lived as the one that Sam Peckinpah had in American cinema. Despite its uneven path, his *oeuvre* remains in our memory and his influence can be perceived in so many action-driven examples of contemporary cinema which, year after year, are churned out using the stylization that he pioneered. He was throughout his cinematic career preoccupied with masculinity and with the dangers that material progress, and its attendant modernity, represent for male subjectivity. For this reason, the image of masculinity he projected in his work was not defiant or triumphant but rather embattled and fragile. In their losing stance, his male protagonists find through violence a way to channel a certain nihilistic despair which, perhaps perversely, also gives them a romantic appeal.

We might wonder whether Peckinpah's attachment to a fading West, his refusal to accept progress, and even his embracing of a masculine ethos where the idea of the all-male bunch supersedes community values and local forms of social inclusion stem from the rather simple inability to accept social change. He projects then a kind of regressive, child-like fantasy, unable to accept or compromise with the disappointments of adult life. As has been so fruitfully explored in many works on the genre, this kind of displacement into narcissistic self-sufficiency has fuelled the Western and helped construct a masculine image that is deeply entrenched in the American imaginary, having fostered a long line of narratives predicated on male heroics. No wonder Mitchell argues that the Western hero's silent demeanor, his resistance to language, bespeaks a "reversion to a pre-Symbolic state in which the self looks to find its needs echoed back unaltered from the world" (165). And yet, despite being attached to an obsolescent male code, drawing upon a fantasy of anachronistic heroism, I would still argue that Peckinpah's work deserves more than just this reading by being - dare I say it - almost pathologically infatuated with failure and male despondency. In its bruised physical and psychological dimensions, masculinity is deeply

suffused with melancholia and, though these aspects have been treated for the most part separately in this work, they are deeply entwined insofar as they are constitutive of Peckinpah's own destructive impulses. In his films, there is a suicidal drive of which he does not seem to be consciously aware and which is best expressed by the end-of-the-line situations which his protagonists steer towards. Peckinpah lacked self-awareness and some degree of self-criticism, failing to anticipate both the impact of his films and more importantly the impact of his statements. This is borne out by how poorly he managed his career and how dispiritingly it ended.

If all of Peckinpah's films deal with masculinity, from the testosterone-soaked *The Wild Bunch* to the more reflective *Junior Bonner*, they also project his obsession with the lost past and with anachronistic figures, dramatizing a kind of self-serving vision of doomed manhood. Peckinpah's films show through their entrapment within the same thematic web that he was incapable of going through a process of mourning - liberating his ego and making way for new object relations - and hence of freeing his subjectivity from a fetishized attachment to loss itself. Nowhere is this feeling more intensely felt than in his valediction to the Western, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid,* which Richard T. Jameson defines as "hurtfully beautiful" (1984: 30). Moreover, his obsession with outlaw figures such as the Kid and his manifest disparagement of lawmen bear out his endorsement of a counter-culture posture with its attendant defiance of the *status quo,* so much embedded in the times in which he lived. The late 60s and 70s offered the ideal context for his iconoclastic instincts and unbridled energy. He briefly survived on to the 80s but his failure to adapt to the right-wing atmosphere of the decade and its new-found business confidence was already apparent. This latter decade rehabilitated the figure of the lawman, most notably in the resurgent cop drama, giving prominence to narratives where order is vindicated and reinforced. Moreover, if the Western was the universal frame which allowed him to comment on social life, it was also his suicide note. The decline of the genre, the loss of the ideals which had sustained its appeal, seem to carry all of Peckinpah's disillusionment and articulate his destructive impulses. Not surprisingly, he was incapable of following the new trends the genre attempted to incorporate in order to survive. Feminist, racial and gay perspectives offered untapped areas which gave directors some leeway to explore new dynamics in a

genre which had exhausted itself and which was desperately trying to discover new frontiers. Ford was able to keep abreast of these trends with his *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), placing the predicament of Native Americans at the heart of his narrative, while Clint Eastwood has thrived in a declining genre, exploring both racial or feminist issues - *The Outlaw Josey Wales* or *Unforgiven* - or even seeking new, metaphoric frontiers in outer space, as in *Space Cowboys* (2000). However, Peckinpah could not embrace these refashionings, his was a world of bruised masculinity, self-sacrificing and under duress. It is apparent that Peckinpah's films, while projecting the social and political instability of his age and the violence that burst out in so many different areas of human existence, also suggest the instability of a personality enamored with the idea of loss. Peckinpah remained throughout his life and cinematic career attached to a self-indulgent fantasy of male comradeship. Women appear from time to time as, at best, peripheral figures; sometimes they are collateral damage in a world dominated by male violence. But contrary to the idea advanced by many critics, who have affirmed women are marginal in Peckinpah's films because he operated in a genre that relegates them to the margins, this thesis argues that women are all too frequently scapegoated for all that is wrong with, what seems to me, a chronically regressive and unhealthy notion of manhood. Peckinpah's misogyny derives from his self-centeredness, his constant indulging in personal wounds, feuds and grievances, his inability to regard relationships in terms of equality and respect.

Interestingly enough, Peckinpah's melancholia finds a correlative in the literary work of Cormac McCarthy who displays the same double-bind position towards the waning American West. Whilst McCarthy demythologizes the Western by laying bare the predatory violence of frontier life - as seen in *Blood Meridian* (1985) for example - he also nostalgically broods over a fading way of life and the encroachment of modernity upon individual freedom. In *All the Pretty Horses* (2000), the characters seem adrift in the social world, attempting to retrieve a dying style of life, that of the cowboy's wandering existence. But they have internalized a clichéd vision of the West and what they come up against is a violent world emptied out of heroic grandiosity. Susan Kollin in her analysis of McCarthy's work argues:

> If *Blood Meridian* may be thought of as an anti-Western, its narrative vision is more Sam Peckinpah than Robert Altman, its treatment of violence in no way restrained or confined, but anarchic and pushed to the extreme. Whereas Altman's critiques of the Western in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971) and *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*, *or Sitting Bull's History Lesson* (1976), were presented with a relatively clear political position Peckinpah used parody in a manner that often subverted his critical vision. His films typically featured a hyperviolent masculinity, and his vision of the region was much harder to discern. Over the years, however, Peckinpah's film *The Wild Bunch* (1969) has come to hold a more significant place in movie history than Altman's Westerns (2001: 562).

While Mexico has been deemed a place of new beginnings and even regeneration in Western mythology, in Peckinpah's films and in McCarthy's work, crossing the border into Mexico can often be seen as a suicidal move, as the region is no longer a haven for outlaws or outcasts. Rather it is a land riven by corruption which can only deliver further disillusionment, as happens with the Bunch or - in *All the Pretty Horses* - with John Grady, [61]a character whose imagination is fuelled by a mythical construction of an outdated West and whose dreams collapse quickly as he faces a brutal reality. In this sense, Kollin's observation about a McCarthy character could have been made about Peckinpah himself:

> *All the Pretty Horses* opens as John Grady mourns the death of his grandfather and the sale of his family's ranch, both signs of his West's demise. The sixteen-year-old protagonist tries to come to terms with the profound sense of loss that structures his life and the region as a whole (570).

Another interesting example of the way the Western still reflects on issues of age and violence can be seen in Joel and Ethan Coen's *No Country for Old Men* (2007), also based on a McCarthy novel. Right from the beginning, the film establishes its nostalgic tone by presenting in voice-over narration the disenchanted musings of old Sheriff Bell (Tommy Lee Jones) and his feeling of displacement from the world as it appears to him, ungraspable in the randomness of its violence. As he reminisces about the old timers, who did not even have to wear a gun, he wonders how "they would operate now" in an unrecognizable social milieu where acts of gang warfare erupt wantonly. Although very different in tone from the

[61] A film, based on McCarthy's novel, was released in 2000 and directed by Billy Bob Thornton. The character John Grady is played by Matt Damon.

stylized set-pieces in Peckinpah's films, *No Country for Old Men* presents an image of masculinity equally tarnished by failure, unable to understand the new, refashioned context to which no longer corresponds predictable moral patterns of crime and punishment. The film suggests that Westerns are still an ideal site to explore the melancholia associated with ageing and anxiety over the inability to adapt to new social mores. Significantly, Anthony Barker argues:

> Set in Texas of the early 1980s, it comments on the western tradition as embodied in the tales of lawmen of the old West. But it crosses this tradition with the graphically violent conventions of the modern crime movie, where fugitives are pursued by implacable hit men. And the determinants of the crime thriller are also fertilized with those of the horror film, where the villain is compared to a supernatural spirit in his indestructibility (2014: 379).

In these representations of the New West, the frontier with Mexico appears as a freshly problematized borderland where contemporary issues such as drug dealing or illegal immigration are dramatized. Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* (2007) also deconstructs the mythology of frontier life and the Western's romanticization of its male heroes by foregrounding a protagonist obsessed with material profit, distrustful of human relations and deeply immersed in his solipsistic interests. Intent on prospecting for oil and enlarging his fortune, Daniel Day Lewis's Plainview - the surname is suggestive of his inability to see beyond the obvious - shows how the frontier adventure was driven by materialism and capitalist aggrandizement. This is confirmed by the way he discards his adopted son when the latter becomes deaf due to an explosion of gas at an oil installation (and so requires more attentive care), something that would prevent Plainview from roaming the country freely in search of new business opportunities. The film offers an alternative narrative about the taming of the West, one which does not try to efface the fact that American progress was not dependent on marksmanship or on a narcissistic masculinity, which the Western so obsessively foregrounds, but rather on hard work, survival instinct and, quite often, personal greed. *There Will Be Blood* is Peckinpahian in title only; its protagonist is the classic Peckinpah villain, looking to rape the range rather than roam it.

These revisited Westerns seem to acknowledge Peckinpah's long-lasting legacy, despite the flaws one can find in even his best work. His violence finds resonance in McCarthy's new West, as Kollin states apropos of the latter's stylized portrayal of violent scenarios:

> Like Peckinpah's group of children who torture scorpions in the opening of *The Wild Bunch*, the youthful characters in *Blood Meridian* are emptied out of their innocence and purity, and prove to be just as caught up in violence and savagery as adults. Rather than treating the children sentimentally, the novel considers them as threatening and expendable as any figures in the text (566-567).

Kollin also offers the caveat that, as in the case of Peckinpah's portrayal of violence, "the project of dismantling violence through excess carries its own risks, a problem that has plagued both literary and cinematic anti-Westerns" (563).

Peckinpah's characters are often haunted by restlessness and by their need to heal their wounds through some kind of human connection which, in his code, usually takes the form of male bonding. This gives rise to an endless quest, invariably thwarted by the world's own unpredictability and ruthlessness. As Mike states at the end of *The Killer Elite:* "Don't know where we are going, don't know where we've been, but I know where we was, wasn't it". This tortured grammar imparts the sense of being cut adrift, which is the most compelling impression that Peckinpah's work gives off and this *unreason* has been for me the most intriguing feature in a director who was most assuredly a "bloody" misogynist. Watching Peckinpah's films has always been a guilty pleasure. While recognizing his childish extolling of a male ethos, his unpalatable personality traits and misogyny, I feel a kind of self-lacerating attraction to the sadness and growing despair detectable in his work.

In *Precarious Life*: *The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) Judith Butler observes how vulnerability is so much a part of the human condition: we are vulnerable since we are dependent on others and this dependence becomes more strongly felt in experiences of loss, and is deeply exposed by experiences of violence. These things disrupt the fantasy of an independent subject who keeps demarcated boundaries between his/her individuality

and the recognition of others' roles in the shaping of subjectivities. Bonnie Mann, analyzing Butler's view, puts it this way:

> The response to the terrifying reality of our dependence on others is not a fantasy that shores up the boundaries of the self and reasserts the sovereignty of the autonomous subject. The fantasy of an autonomous and sovereign subject is laid to waste by such experiences because I find that who I am is so intimately entangled with Others that I am not the simple agent of what these relations make of me (Mann 2006: 133).

These views are manifest in Peckinpah's work since he constructed a world where the sovereignty of the (male) subject is impacted upon by others and so is painfully revealed in all its vulnerability, either through emotional dependence or through the ongoing possibility of injury. His cinema gains thus an unexpected poignancy which emerges from beneath the tough façade of his violent America. It remains a moot point whether these psychic forces were sufficiently under control in either Peckinpah's films or his work, but the results of his struggles, his films, are at least compelling.

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TV Work

Gunsmoke (1955-1958)- Peckinpah wrote eleven episodes adapted from *Gunsmoke* radio plays by John Meston with the following titles: "The Queue", "Yorky", "Cooter", "How to Die for Nothing", "The Guitar", "The Round Up", "Legal Revenge, Poor Pearl", "Jealousy", "How to kill a Woman and "Dirt". He also wrote scripts, and directed some episodes, for the following TV series:

20th Century Fox Hour. "End of a Gun" (1957)

*Tales of Wells Fargo. "*Apache Gold" (1957)

Boots and Saddles. "The Captain" (1958)

*Tombstone Territory: "*Johnny Ringo Last Ride" (1958)

Man without a Gun: "The Kidder" (1958)

Broken Arrow: "The Teacher" (1957) "The Assassin" (1957) and "The Transfer" (1958)

Klondike: "Klondike Fever" (1960)

The Rifleman (1958-1959)

Dick Powell's Zane Grey Theater (1950-60)

The Westerner (1960)

Pericles on 31st Street (1962)

Noon Wine (1966)

Main Filmography

The Deadly Companions, 1961

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: William H. Clothier

Producer: Charles B. FitzSimons

Released by Pathé- American

Ride the High Country, 1962

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: Lucien Ballard

Producer: Richard E. Lyons

Released by Metro Goldwyn Mayer

Major Dundee 1966

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: Sam Leavitt

Producer: Jerry Bresler

Released by Columbia Pictures

The Wild Bunch, 1969

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: Lucien Ballard

Producer: Phil Feldman

Released by Warner Brothers/ Seven Arts

The Ballad of Cable Hogue, 1970

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematograhy: Lucien Ballard

Producer: Phil Feldman

Released by Warner Brothers

Straw Dogs, 1971

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: John Coquillon

Producer: Daniel Melnick

Released by ABC Pictures Talent Associates

Junior Bonner, 1972

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: Lucien Ballard

Producer: Joe Wizan

Released by Cinerama Releasing Corporation

The Getaway, 1972

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: Lucien Ballard

Producers: David Foster, Mitchell Brower

Released by First Artists

Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, 1973

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematograpy: John Coquillon

Producer: Gordon Carroll and Sam Peckinpah

Released by Metro Goldwyn Mayer

Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia, 1974

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: Alex Philips, Jr.

Producer: Martin Baum

Released by United Artists

The Killer Elite, 1975

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: Phil Lathrop

Producers: Martin Baum, Arthur Lewis

Released by United Artists

Cross of Iron, 1977

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: John Coquillon

Producer: Wolf Hartwig

Released by EMI Films

Convoy, 1978

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: Harry Stradling, Jr.

Producer: Robert E. Sherman

Released by United Artists/E.M.I.

The Osterman Weekend, 1983

Director: Sam Peckinpah

Cinematography: John Coquillon

Producers: Peter S. David, William N. Panzer

Released by Twentieth Century Fox

Filmography: **Westerns Referenced**

All the Pretty Horses. 2000. Dir. Billy Bob Thornton. Columbia Pictures/Miramax Films.

Bad Girls. 1994. Jonathan Kaplan. Twentieth Century Fox.

Bend of the River. 1952. Dir. Anthony Mann. Universal International.

Blazing Saddles. 1974. Dir. Mel Brooks. Warner Brothers.

Buchanan Rides Alone. 1958. Dir. Budd Boetticher. Columbia Pictures.

Buffalo Bill and the Indians. 1976. Dir. Robert Altman. United Artists.

Calamity Jane. 1953. Dir. David Butler. Warner Brothers.

Cat Ballou. 1965. Dir. Eliott Silverstein. Columbia Pictures.

Comanche Station. 1960. Dir. Budd Boetticher. Columbia Pictures.

Comes a Horseman. 1978. Dir. Alan J. Pakula. United Artists.

Decision at Sundown. 1957. Dir. Budd Boetticher. Columbia Pictures.

Destry Rides Again. 1939. Dir. George Marshall. Universal Pictures.

Duel in the Sun. 1946. Dir. King Vidor, Selznick Releasing Organisation.

For a Few Dollars More. 1965. Dir. Sergio Leone. United Artists (US and UK).

For a Fistful of Dollars.1964. Dir. Sergio Leone. United Artists (US and UK).

Fort Apache. 1948. John Ford. RKO Radio Pictures.

Hannie Caulder. 1971. Dir. Burt Kennedy. Tigon.

Heaven's Gate. 1980. Dir. Michael Cimino. United Artists.

High Noon. 1952. Dir. Fred Zinnemann. United Artists.

High Plains Drifter. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Universal Pictures.

How The West Was Won. 1962. Dir. John Ford, Henry Hathaway. Metro Goldwyn Mayer.

Johnny Guitar.1944. Dir. Nicholas Ray. Republic Pictures.

Little Big Man. 1970. Dir. Arthur Penn. Cinema Center Films.

Lonely are the Brave. 1962. David Miller. Universal Pictures.

Man of the West. 1958. Anthony Mann. United Artists.

Monte Walsh. 1970. Dir. William A. Fraker. Cinema Center Films.

My Darling Clementine. 1946. Dir. John Ford. Twentieth Century Fox.

One Eyed Jacks. 1961. Dir. Marlon Brando. Paramount Pictures.

Open Range. 2003. Dir. Kevin Costner. Touchstone Pictures.

Pale Rider. 1985. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Warner Brothers.

Posse.1993. Mario Van Peebles. Polygram Filmed Entertainment.

Pursued. 1947. Dir. Raoul Walsh. Warner Brothers.

Rancho Notorious. 1952. Dir. Fritz Lang. RKO Radio Pictures.

Red River. 1948. Dir. Howard Hawks. United Artists.

Rio Bravo. 1959. Dir. Howard Hawks. Warner Brothers.

Rio Lobo. 1970. Dir. Howard Hawks. National General Pictures (US), Twentieth Century Fox (UK).

Seven Men from Now. 1956. Dir. Budd Boetticher. Warner Brothers.

Shane. 1953. Dir. George Stevens. Paramount Pictures.

She Wore a Yellow Ribbon.1949. Dir. John Ford. RKO Radio Pictures.

Silverado. 1985. Dir. Lawrence Kasdan. Columbia Pictures.

Soldier Blue. 1970 Dir Arthur Penn. AVCO Embassy Pictures.

Stagecoach. 1939. Dir. John Ford. United Artists.

Support your Local Sheriff. 1969. Dir. Burt Kennedy. United Artists

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford. 2007. Andrew Dominik. Warner Brothers.

The Ballad of Josie. 1967. Dir. Andrew V. McLaglen. Universal Studios.

The Ballad of Little Jo. 1993. Dir. Maggie GreenWald. Fine Line Features.

The Big Country. 1958. William Wyler. United Artists.

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly. 1966. Dir. Sergio Leone. United Artists.

The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid. 1972. Dir. Philip Kaufman. Universal Pictures.

The Gunfighter. 1950. Dir. Henry King. Twentieth Century Fox. 1950.

The Hired Hand. 1971. Dir. Peter Fonda. Universal Studios.

The Homesman. 2014. Dir. Tommy Lee Jones. Roadside Attractions Saban Films.

The Lusty Men. 1952. Dir. Nicholas Ray. RKO Radio Pictures.

The Man From Laramie. 1955. Dir. Anthony Mann. Columbia Pictures.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance. 1962. Dir. John Ford. Paramount Pictures.

The Missouri Breaks. 1976. Dir. Arthur Penn. United Artists.

The Naked Spur. 1954. Dir. Anthony Mann. Metro Goldwyn Mayer.

The Outlaw. 1943. Dir. Howard Hughes. United Artists.

The Professionals. 1960. Richard Brooks. Columbia Pictures.

The Quick and the Dead. 1995. Dir. Sam Raimi. TriStar Pictures.

The Searchers. 1956. Dir. John Ford. Warner Brothers.

The Shootist. 1976. Dir. Don Siegel. Paramount Pictures.

The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada. 2005. Dir. Tommy Lee Jones. Sony Pictures Classics.

The True Story of Jesse James. Dir. Nicholas Ray. Twentieth Century Fox.

The Westerner. 1940. Dir. William Wyler. United Artists.

Three Mules for Sister Sara. 1971. Dir. Don Siegel. Universal Pictures.

3:10 to Yuma. 1957. Dir.Delmer Daves. Columbia Pictures.

3:10 to Yuma. 2007. Dir.James Mangold. Lionsgate.

True Grit. 1969. Dir. Henry Hathaway.Paramount Pictures.

True Grit. 2010. Dir. The Coen brothers. Paramount Pictures.

Two Rode Together. 1961. Dir. John Ford. Columbia Pictures.

Ulzana's Raid. 1972. Dir. Robert Aldrich. MCA/ Universal Pictures.

Unforgiven. 1992. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Warner Brothers.

Wagon Master. 1950. Dir. John Ford. RKO Radio Pictures.

Winchester 73. 1950. Dir. Anthony Mann. Universal International.

Other genres:

Alice's Restaurant. 1969. Dir. Arthur Penn. United Artists.

A History of Violence. 2005. Dir. David Cronenberg. New Line Cinema.

A Perfect World. 1993. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Warner Brothers.

A Woman under the Influence. 1974. Dir. John Cassavettes. Cine-Source.

Basic instinct. 1992. Dir. Paul Verhoeven. TriStar Pictures.

Ben Hur. 1956. Dir. William Wyler. Metro Goldwyn Mayer.

Bob and Carol, Ted and Alice. 1969. Dir. Paul Mazursky. Columbia Pictures.

Bonnie and Clyde. 1967. Dir. Arthur Penn. Warner Brothers / Seven Arts.

Bright Star. 2009. Dir. Jane Campion. Apparition (US), Warner Brothers (UK/France).

Carnal Knowledge. 1971. Dir. Mike Nichols. AVCO Embassy Pictures.

Collateral. 2004. Dir. Michael Mann. DreamWorks Picture (North America), Paramount Pictures (international).

Coogan's Bluff. 1968. Dir. Don Siegel. Universal Pictures.

Deliverance. 1972. Dir. John Boorman. Warner Brothers.

Dog Day Afternoon. 1975. Dir. Sidney Lumet. Warner Brothers.

Easy Rider. 1967. Dir. Peter Fonda. Columbia Pictures.

El Cid. 1961. Dir. Anthony Mann. Allied Artists.

Fatal Attraction. 1987. Dir. Adrian Lyne. Paramount Pictures.

Five Easy Pieces. 1970. Dir. Bob Rafelson. Columbia Pictures.

Frenzy. 1972. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Universal Pictures.

Fight Club. 1999. David Fincher. Twentieth Century Fox.

Full Metal Jacket. 1987. Stanley Kubrick. Warner Brothers (US), Columbia Cannon Warner (UK).

Get Carter. 1971. Dir. Mike Hodges. Metro Goldwyn Mayer.

Gun Crazy. 1950. Dir. Joseph H. Lewis. United Artists.

Heartbreak Ridge. 1986. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Warner Brothers.

It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World. 1963. Dir. Stanley Kramer. United Artists.

Khartoum. 1966. Dir. Basil Dearden. United Artists.

Klute. 1971. Dir. Alan J. Pakula. Warner Brothers.

Last Tango in Paris. 1972. Dir. Bernardo Bertolucci. United Artists.

Le Mépris. 1963. Jean-Luc Godard. Embassy Pictures (International).

Looking For Mr Goodbar. 1977. Dir. Richard Brooks. Paramount Pictures.

Magnolia. 1999. Dir.Paul Thomas Anderson. New Line Cinema.

Melancholia. 2011. Dir. Lars Von Trier. Nordisk Film.

Midnight Cowboy. 1969. Dir. John Schlesinger. United Artists.

Night Moves. 1975. Dir. Arthur Penn. Warner Brothers.

No Country for Old Men. 2007. Dir. The Coen brothers. Miramax Films/ Paramount Vantage.

On the Water Front. 1954. Dir.Elia Kazan. Columbia Pictures.

One Flew Over a Cuckoo's Nest. 1975. Dir. Milos Forman. United Artists.

Paris Texas. 1974. Dir. Wim Wenders. Twentieth Century Fox (USA).

Paths of Glory. 1957. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. United Artists.

Point Blank. 1967. Dir. John Boorman. Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1967.

Rambo: First Blood Part II. 1985. Dir. George P. Cosmatos. TriStar Pictures.

Rashomon. 1950. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Daiei Film.

Seven Samurai. 1954. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Toho.

Scarlet Street. 1945. Dir. Fritz Lang. Universal Pictures.

Space Cowboys. 2000. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Warner Brothers.

Taxi Driver. 1976. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Columbia Pictures.

The Asphalt Jungle. 1950. Dir. John Huston. Metro Goldwyn Mayer.

The Big Heat. 1953. Dir. Fritz Lang. Columbia Pictures.

The Dirty Dozen. 1967. Dir. Robert Aldrich. Metro Goldwyn Mayer.

The French Connection. 1971. Dir. William Friedkin. Twentieth Century Fox.

The Godfather. 1972. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount Pictures.

The Graduate. 1967. Dir. Mike Nichols. AVCO Embassy Pictures (US), United Arttists.

The Greatest Story Ever Told. 1965. Dir. George Stevens. United Artists.

The Incredible Shrinking Man. 1957. Dir. Jack Arnold. Universal Pictures.

The Killing. 1956. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. United Artists.

The King of Marvin Gardens. 1972. Dir. Bob Rafelson. Columbia Pictures.

The Last Picture Show. 1971. Dir. Peter Bogdanovich. Columbia Pictures.

The Long Goodbye. 1973. Dir. Robert Altman. United Artists.

The Night of the Living Dead. 1968. Dir. George Romero. Walter Reade Organization.

The Passenger. 1975. Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. Metro Goldwyn Mayer, United Artists.

The Treasure of Sierra Madre. 1948. Dir. John Huston. Warner Brothers.

There Will Be Blood. 2007. Dir. Paul Thomas Anderson. Miramax Films/ Paramount Vantage.

Thieves Like Us. Dir. 1974. Robert Altman. United Artists.

Top Gun. 1986. Dir. Tony Scott. Paramount Pictures.

Who's That Knocking at my Door? 1967. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Trimod Films.